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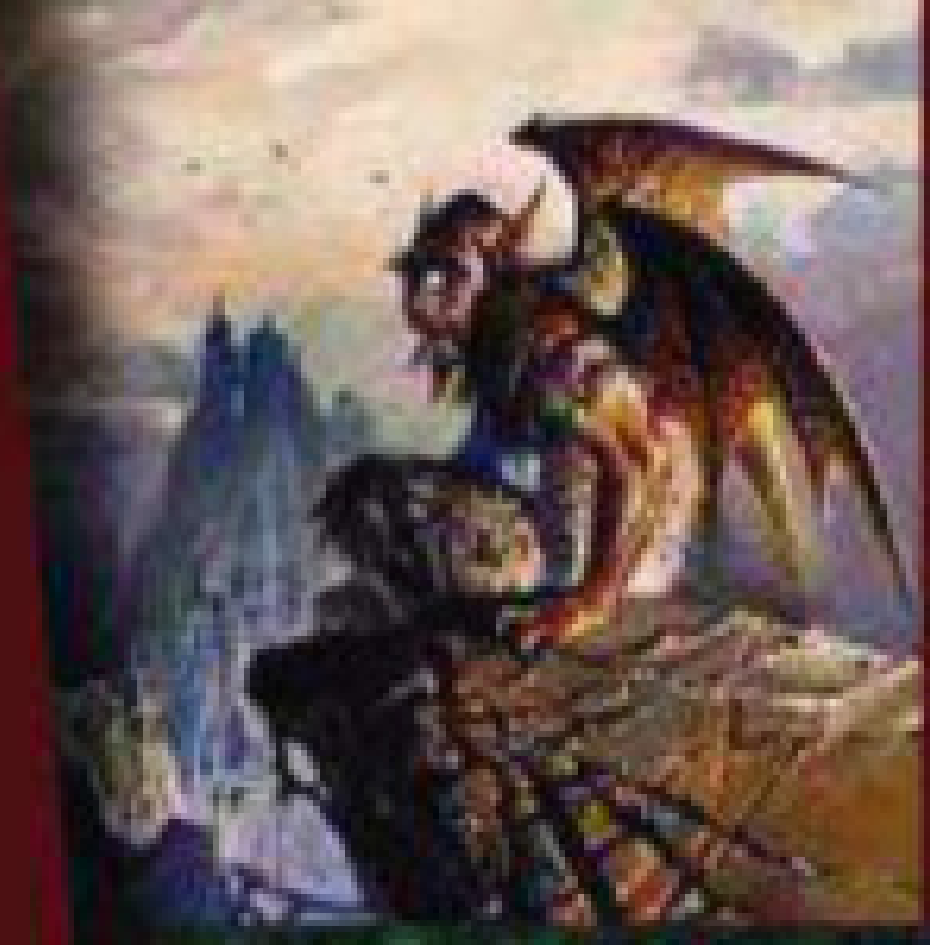

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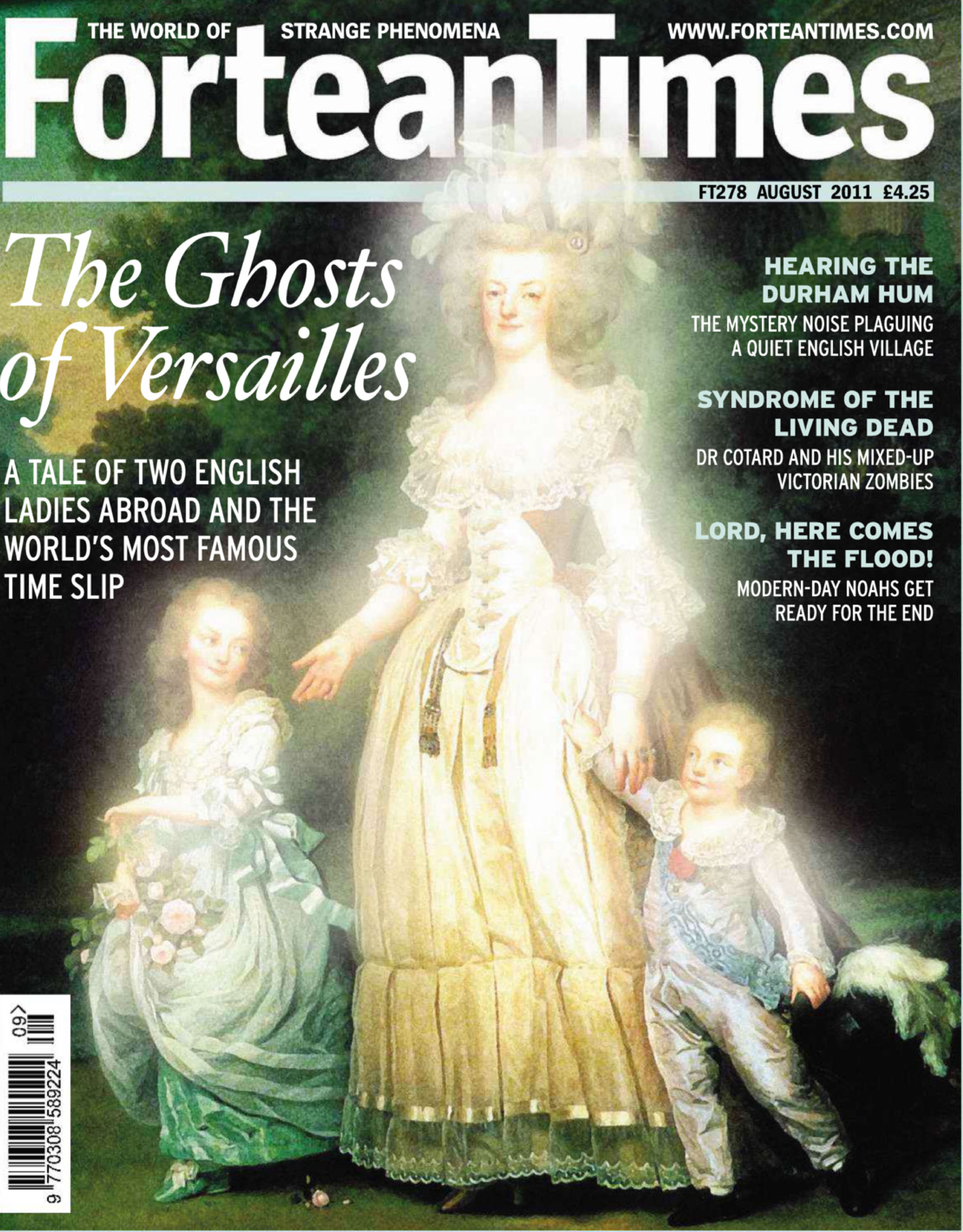

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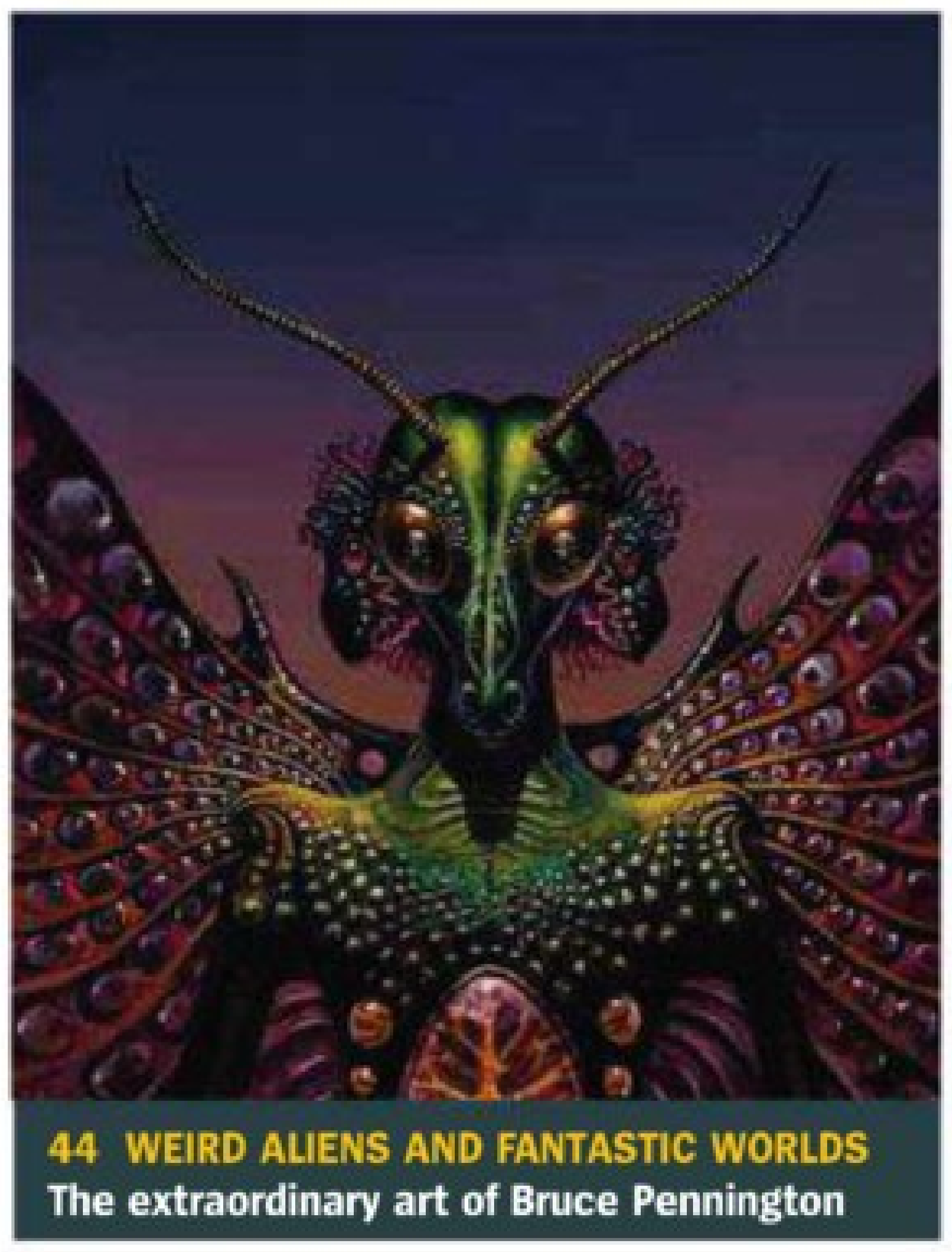

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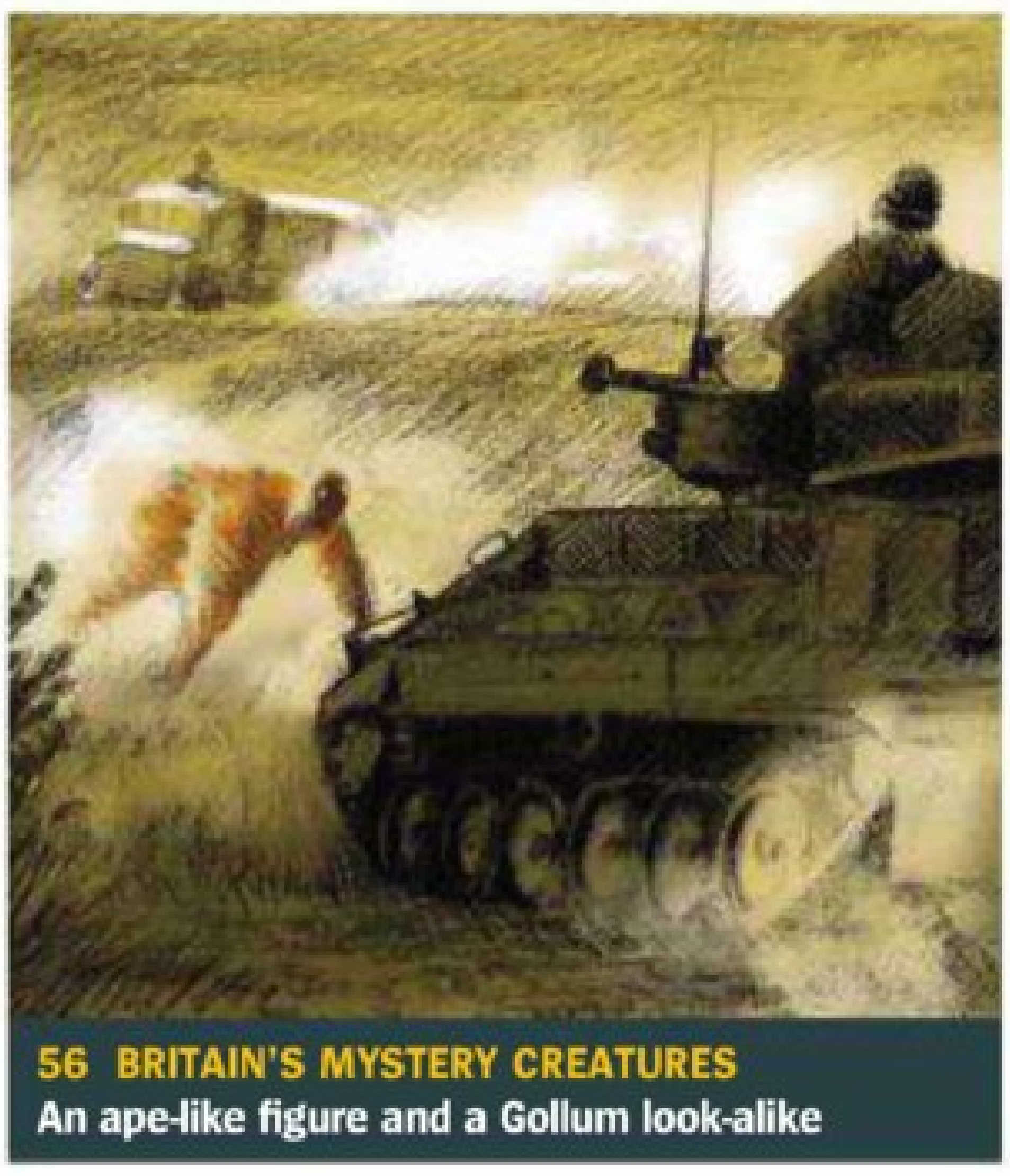

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Gnome attack: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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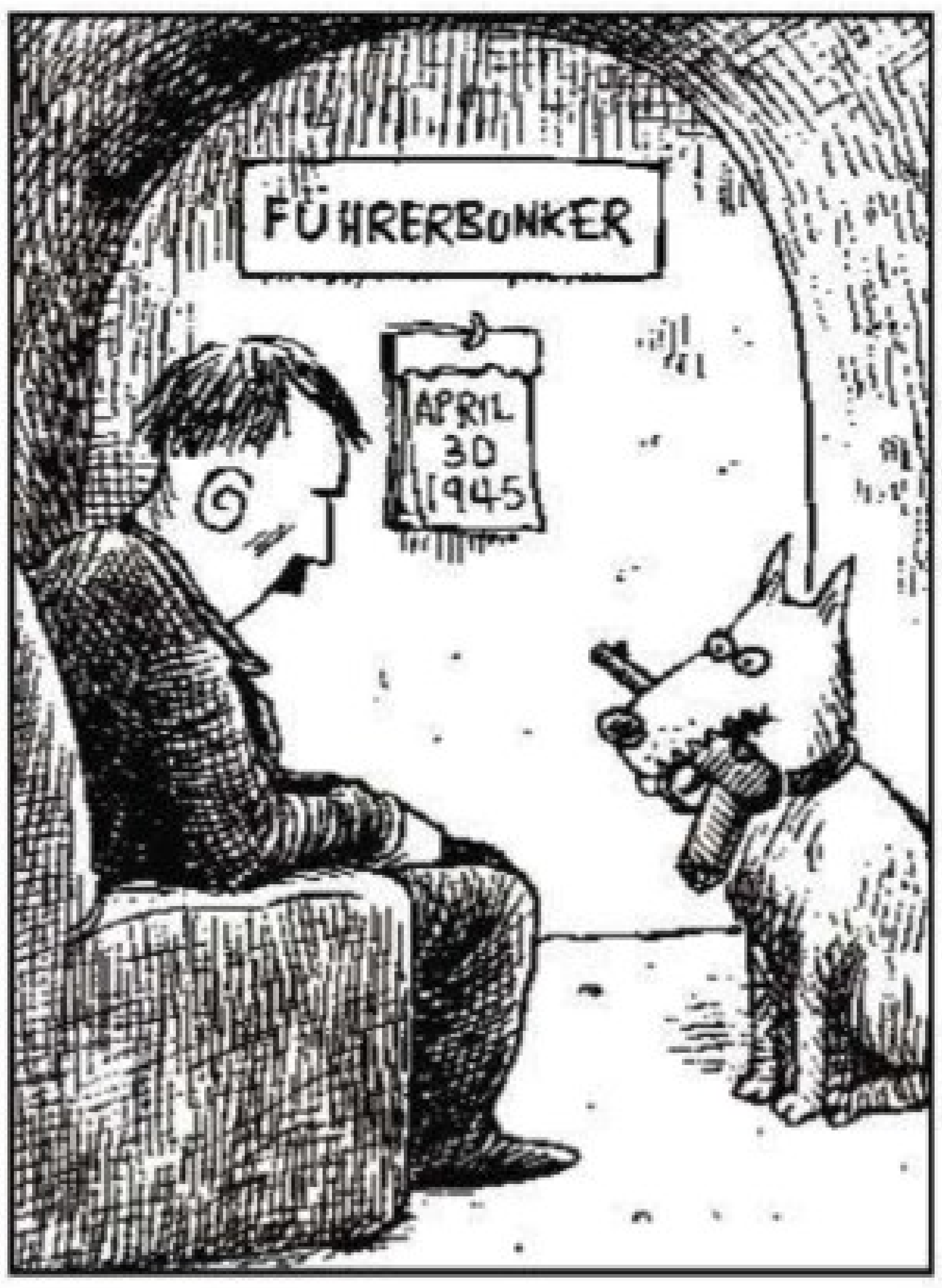
editorial

Attack of the Killer Nazi Dogs

At *FT* we're quite used to observing how the mainstream media, particularly the tabloid newspapers, take a story and 'improve' on it (take, for example, most coverage of 'UFO' incidents), but for our regular contributor Jan Bondeson it was something of a surprise to experience such journalistic interventions at first hand. Jan's latest book is *Amazing Dogs: A Cabinet of Canine Curiosities*, and in this issue we present an extract from it dealing with the story of Rolf, a 'canine intellectual' who was believed by many to provide startling proof of animal intelligence and support for the theories of Germany's 'new animal psychology' movement (pp36–42). As Jan points out, books about historic (and mostly long-dead) dogs seldom make the news. But due to the assiduous efforts of the book's publicist, this one proved an exception.



MARTIN ROSS

As Jan's article shows, the new animal psychologists – who took their cue from the work of eccentrics Wilhelm von Osten and Karl Krall with horses, such as the celebrated 'Clever Hans' – believed that dogs were capable of the most amazing feats, including writing poetry, learning foreign languages and speculating about God. What's perhaps even more surprising is that this decidedly crankish movement remained active even during the Nazi era. In fact, the Nazis were rather keen on animal rights (less hot on human ones, of course) and there is – as Jan's article shows – evidence that they took an interest in the idea of super-intelligent dogs. Jan takes up the story as follows:

"Nazi scientists certainly experimented with dog-human communication, probably with military uses for the dogs in mind. This was the birth of a news story that would travel around the world.

"First, the London tabloids took up the story with gusto, with headlines like 'Heel Hitler!', 'Hitler's Luftwoofer!' and 'Woofen-SS!' The images provided by the publicist were made good use of, with the irrepressible *Sun* newspaper making fun of Karl Krall's telepathy experiment: the human is thinking 'This war is a total catastrophe,' while the dog thinks 'Did he say anything about a cat?' The captions to the illustrations were ignored, however; thus the newspaper reader would not know that Krall's experiment had actually been made in the early 1920s, or that Rolf the wonder-dog had been dead for 14 years already when the Nazis took over.

"Reporting the story third hand, the Australian and American newspapers added some spicy inventions of their own: the Nazis recruited a vast army of educated dogs all over the country; the animals were to become stormtroopers, bilingual spies, or even terrorists; and Hitler was personally involved in training them. Many foreign newspapers were completely stumped by the "Woofen-SS!" joke, giving this as the proper name of the Nazi canine commandos!"

Jan wondered why none of his previous books had caused such an outburst of journalistic 'creativity'; we suspect that, as the late humorist Alan Coren – who famously added a gratuitous swastika to the cover of his book *Golfing for Cats* – knew, journalists are just like everyone else: they simply can't resist the awesome combined power of Nazis and cuddly animals (even without the golf).

And if anyone believes that such journalistic 'improvements' are the sole preserve of the red-topped lower orders of the newspaper world, then the recent revelation that Johann Hari, prize-winning darling of the left-wing press, has made repeated and highly creative use of the old scissors and paste in his 'exclusive' interviews should give them pause for thought…

UnConvention news

Plans for this year's UnCon proceed apace, with the latest speakers to sign up for the world's weirdest weekend being journalist, author and documentary maker Jon Ronson, and Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, authors of last issue's feature on Galileo and the Hermetica. Turn to page 13 for further details and to find out how to book your tickets.

DAVID SUTTON

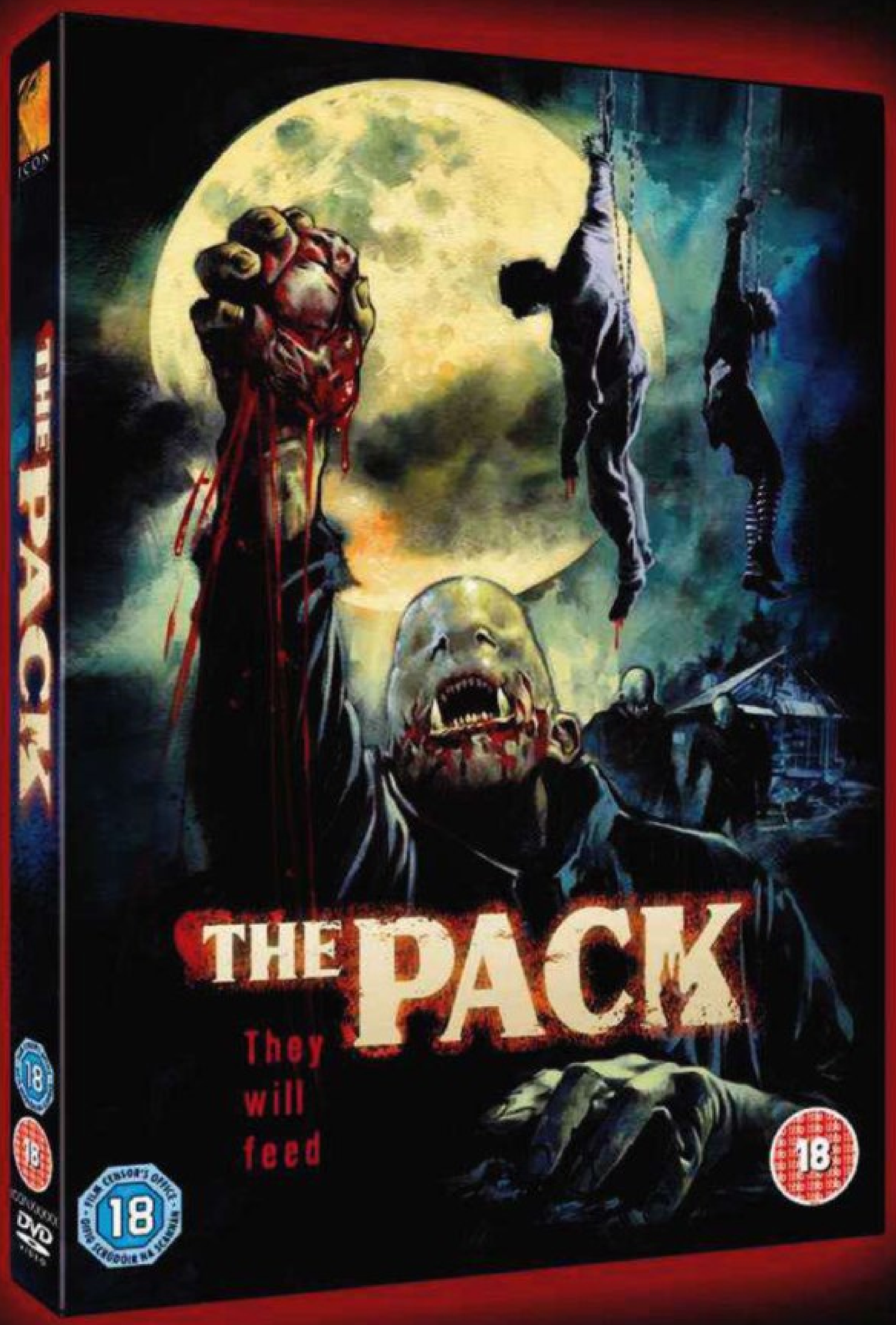
BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

"A demented, black humour-tinged slice of backwoods horror"

★★★★ Bizarre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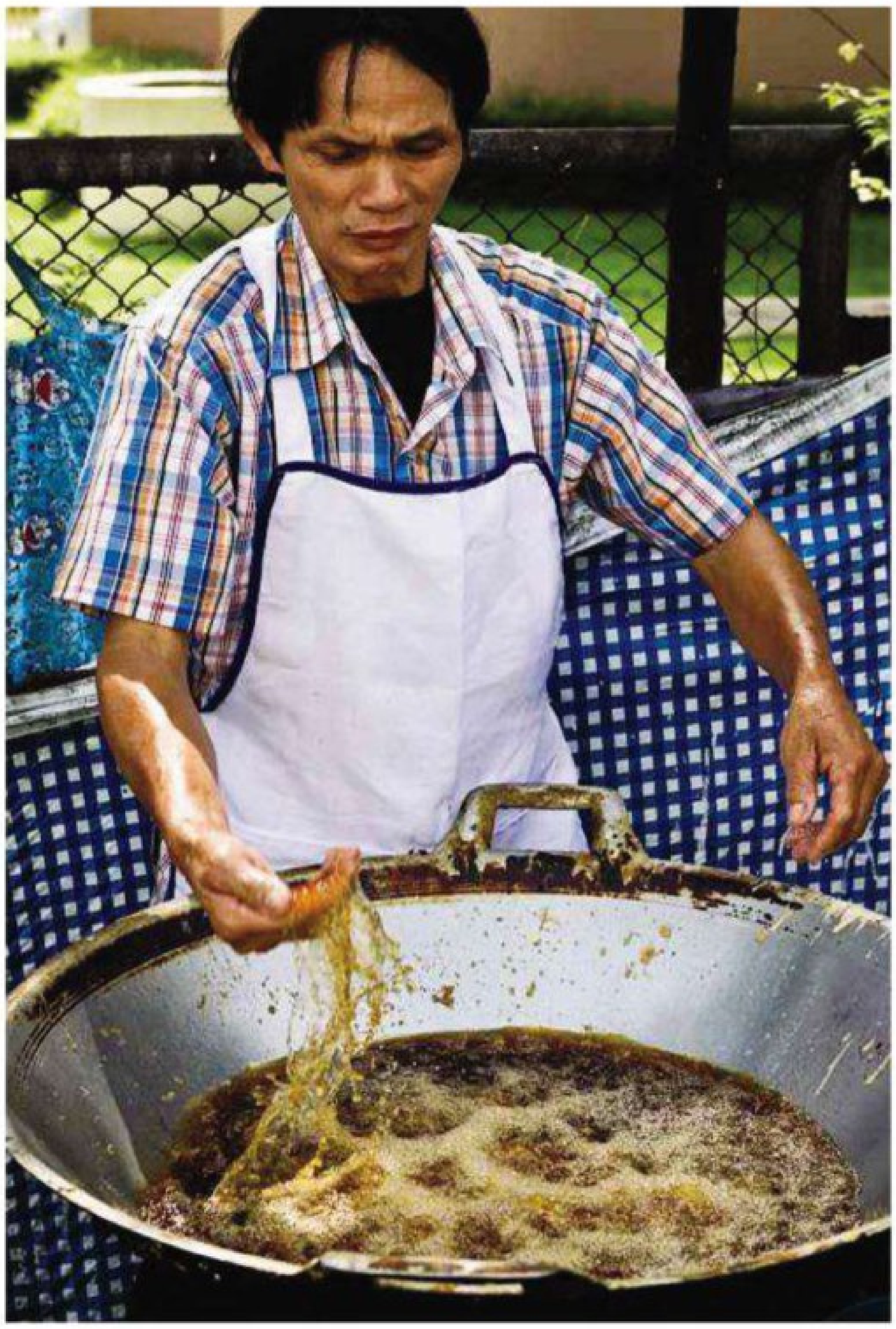
SUPERHANDS

Kann Trichan, a 50-year-old chef from Chiang Mai in Thailand, is known as "superhands" because of his ability to immerse his hands in boiling fat (right). "When I put my hands into the oil it feels hot but it doesn't burn or blister my skin. I can fry rice, chicken, and many things with just my bare hands." He discovered his unusual talent seven years ago when he was accidentally splashed with hot oil but suffered no injury. The father of two was working on his fried chicken stall when he saw a squirrel balancing on a tree eating a mango. The mango fell and splashed into a huge wok of hot fat right next to him. "The fat flew everywhere, all over my head, arms, hands," he said. "It should have seriously hurt me. I remember looking in a mirror, expecting to see blisters and red blotches, but there was nothing."

To the astonishment of his fellow market stallholders, he went back to work the next day. He started experimenting and began picking out pieces of fried chicken from the hot fat with his hands. "The people were loving it," he said. "They'd never seen anything like it before. People were coming from all over just to buy my chicken and watch me spoon it out with my hands."



BARCROFT MEDIA / BRONEK KAMINKSI

Mr Trichan holds the Guinness world record for picking 20 pieces of fried chicken out of 480°C (896°F) boiling fat in one minute. He has become an international star and has travelled the world with his wife Tuan, 45, demonstrating his skills. His daughter Supalak, 34, and son Jessada, 27, couldn't be prouder. "I have no idea how I do what I do," he said. "It's crazy, but my stall gets busier and busier every day." You can visit him outside Chiang Mai technical college, 470 miles (756km) north of Bangkok. *D.Mail, 6 June 2011.*

"I have no idea how I do what I do," Kann Trichan said

ANTS IN EARS

A 16-year-old girl from Taiwan visited a doctor about itchiness in her ears. Dr Hung Yuan-Tsung, chief of the otolaryngology division of Taipei City Hospital, found more than 20 ants in her right ear and six in her left ear. She loved snacking in bed and fallen crumbs from her nocturnal treats had attracted the insects, which were allegedly drawn to her ears after she had scratched them. She had sometimes noticed them crawling out from her ears, but had never imagined that they were actually living there. Her ears were red and swollen but luckily for her, early treatment saved her from permanent damage. *China National News, 23 May 2011.*

PUT UNDER PRESSURE

On 21 May, truck driver Steven McCormack, 48, (facing page) from Opotiki in New Zealand, slipped between the cab and the trailer of his truck, breaking a compressed air hose off an air reservoir that powered the brakes. The brass nozzle pierced his left buttock and began pumping air into his body at 100lb per square inch (7kg per sq cm), causing him to expand like a cartoon character. He began to scream as his neck, feet and hands swelled up. "I felt the air rush into my body and thought it was going to explode from my foot," he said. "I was blowing up like a football… it felt like I had the bends, like in diving. I had no choice but just to lie there, blowing up like a balloon."

Workmates rushed to his aid, turning off the compressed air and packing ice around his swollen neck. Ambulance officers removed the nozzle and rushed him to Whakatane Hospital, where a surgeon treated the injury and drained one of his lungs, which had filled with fluid.

GNOME AGGRESSION

Beware the "Shorty-Eared One" and the "Monkey Witch"

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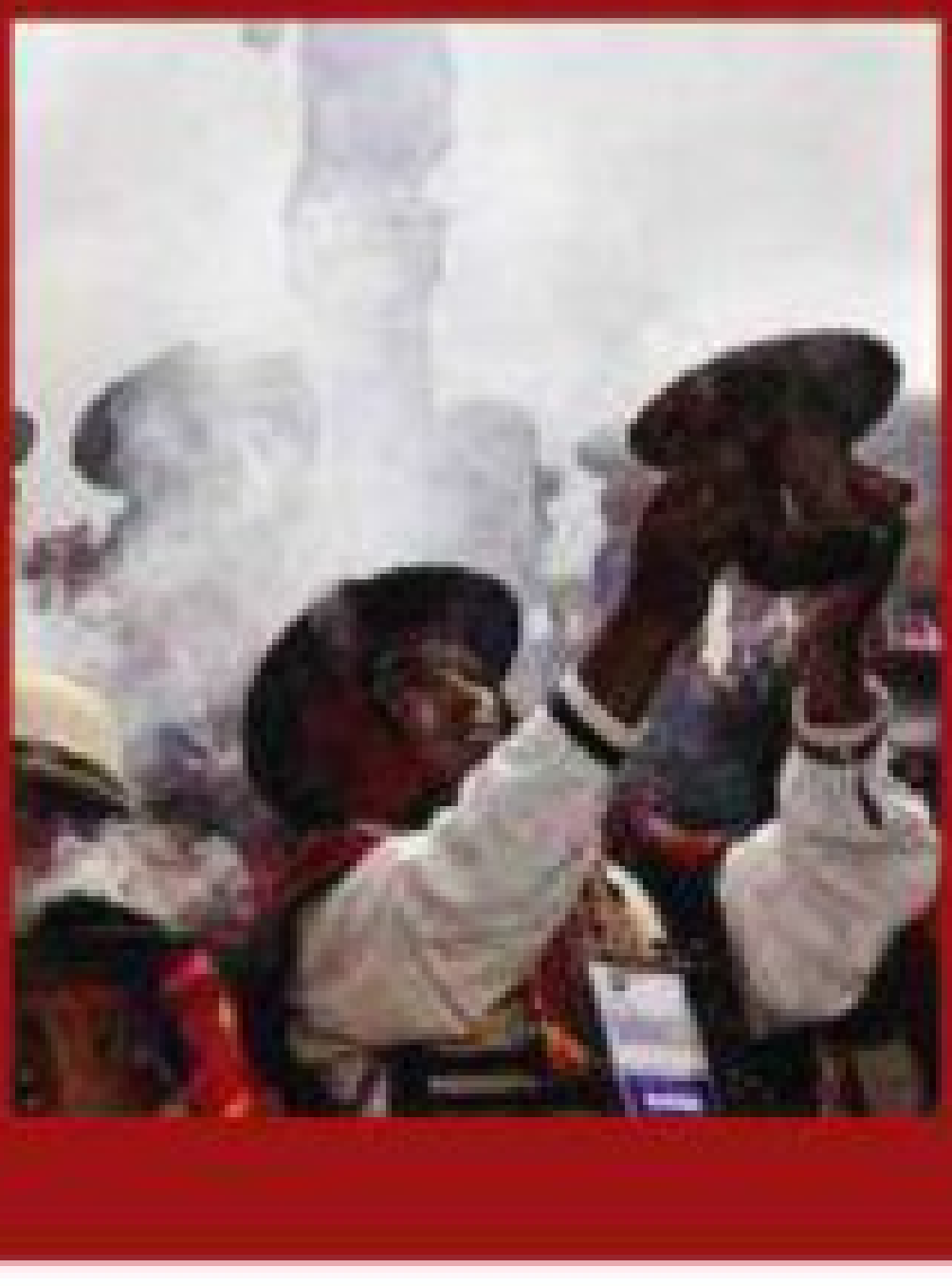


NO SENSE OF TIMING

Which way does time flow? Does it even exist?

PAGE 11

SOMETHING IN THE AIR

Atmosphere warms before a quake, and bugs make it rain

PAGE 24

Doctors later told him that the air had not entered his bloodstream but had separated fat from muscle. They were surprised his skin hadn't burst. He said his skin felt "like a pork roast", hard and crackly on the outside but soft underneath.

A hospital spokeswoman said he was lucky to be alive. Surgeon Dr Barnaby Smith said by the time he arrived at the hospital, the gas had made its way into his abdominal cavity and chest. "It even tracked as high as his eyelids – he couldn't open them because they were so swollen," he said. "He had gas within the chest cavity compressing the lungs and heart." Dr Smith said such an injury wasn't in the textbooks, and it was the first time anyone he knew had seen it. McCormack confided that the air was gradually escaping from his body in the way that air usually does. *[ABC/AFP] BBC News, telegraph.co.uk, 25 May 2011.*

PA PHOTOS / AP / SAMANTHA MOTION

NOTHING BUT RICE

Former caterer Micaela Stafford, 53, from Loughborough, Leicestershire, can eat nothing but rice, and has dropped 42lb (19kg) in weight. She loves curries and fried breakfasts but since 1999 has been allergic to anything with milk, gluten, wheat, sugar, oil or fat. Baffled doctors fear her life is at risk because of a lack of protein, vitamins and minerals. Mrs Stafford, a mother of two, takes a gas stove, pots, pans and rice out with her to cook on the move. "If I have anything else I have to go to bed for a week with migraine, sickness, diarrhœa and joint pains," she said. "My body shuts down. Sometimes I feel like I don't have the energy to fight it any more. I want my life back." *Metro, Sun, 9 May 2011.*

IT'S NO JOKE

When Claire Scott, 24, hears a good joke, she falls over laughing. The mother of two suffers from cataplexy – a rare sleep disorder that makes her pass out whenever she gets the giggles. She said: "The other week my little girl told me a joke she'd made up at school. It didn't even make sense but I burst out laughing. The next thing I knew, my husband was picking me up off the kitchen floor." Mrs Scott, from Jersey, has always had the condition but was diagnosed just last year. "Sometimes I am aware before it happens," she said. "Other times, I completely black out and I'm left paralysed." *Metro, 25 May 2011.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Farmer fined after death

Western Daily Press, 23 Feb 2011.

Parrots 'are left handed'

D.Telegraph, 3 Feb 2011.

'Environmentally friendly' fish can't back up claims

D.Telegraph, 10 Jan 2011.

Body Found In Berkeley Cemetery

KTVI-FOX2.now.com, 22 Feb 2011.

Monster from deep terrorises township

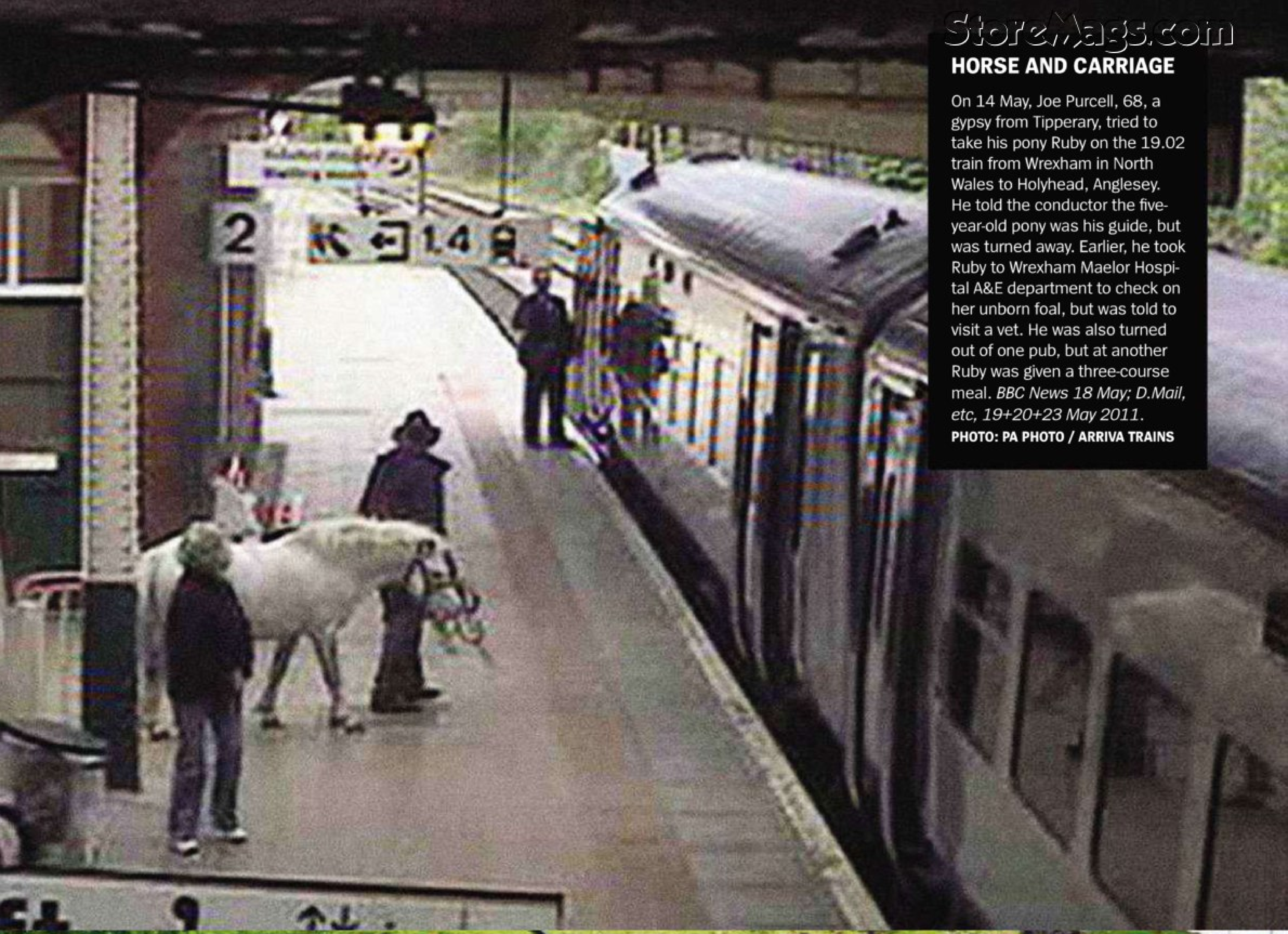
(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 24 Feb 2011.

Squirrel drives car off road by hiding nuts inside the engine

D.Telegraph, 28 Jan 2011.

Exotic alien plant species are moving in on ghost estates in Cahersiveen

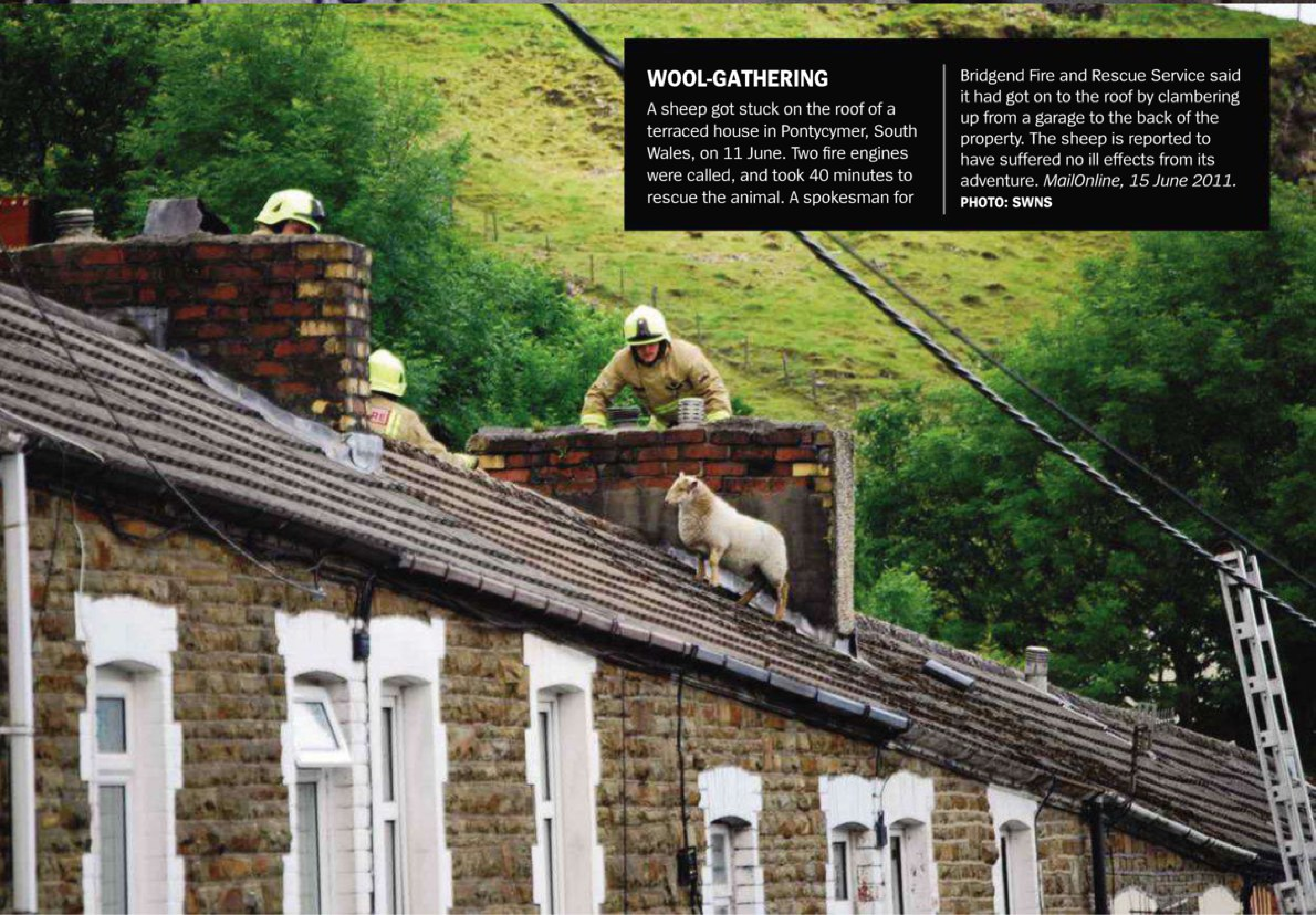
Irish Times, 21 Feb 2011.



HORSE AND CARRIAGE

On 14 May, Joe Purcell, 68, a gypsy from Tipperary, tried to take his pony Ruby on the 19.02 train from Wrexham in North Wales to Holyhead, Anglesey. He told the conductor the five-year-old pony was his guide, but was turned away. Earlier, he took Ruby to Wrexham Maelor Hospital A&E department to check on her unborn foal, but was told to visit a vet. He was also turned out of one pub, but at another Ruby was given a three-course meal. *BBC News 18 May; D.Mail, etc, 19+20+23 May 2011.*

PHOTO: PA PHOTO / ARRIVA TRAINS



WOOL-GATHERING

A sheep got stuck on the roof of a terraced house in Pontycymer, South Wales, on 11 June. Two fire engines were called, and took 40 minutes to rescue the animal. A spokesman for Bridgend Fire and Rescue Service said it had got on to the roof by clambering up from a garage to the back of the property. The sheep is reported to have suffered no ill effects from its adventure. *MailOnline, 15 June 2011.*

PHOTO: SWNS

STRANGER ON THE SHORE

A young Antarctic Emperor penguin got lost hunting for food and ended up on 20 June stranded on Peka Peka Beach in New Zealand's North Island, at least 2,000 miles (3,200km) from home. To cool down it ate sand, mistaking it for ice, and was taken to Wellington Zoo to have the sand (and bits of driftwood) removed. It was to be released into the Southern Ocean, about half way home. The last sighting of a wild Emperor in New Zealand was on the southern Oreti beach in 1967. *[AP, NZPA] 22+26 June; Metro, 30 June 2011*.

PHOTO: PA PHOTO / AP / RICHARD GILL, DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

STIRRUP CUP

Henry, a 10-year-old Appaloosa pony, enjoys a beer every Sunday with the locals in the Logan Pub, St Arnaud, Australia. He was overweight and had damaged hooves when he was rescued by publican and horse racing enthusiast Geoff Turner, 72. Eight months later, he stole half a pint and has been a regular tippler ever since, although according to Turner: "Someone might have a quarter beer left and he'll finish it, but he knows his limits". *MailOnline, 17 June 2011.*

PHOTO: REX FEATURES / /NEWSPIX / ANDREW TAUBER

VB
THE PUB IN THE SCRUB
MELBOURNE BITTER
VICTORIA BITTER

SIDELINES...

METEORITE NEWS

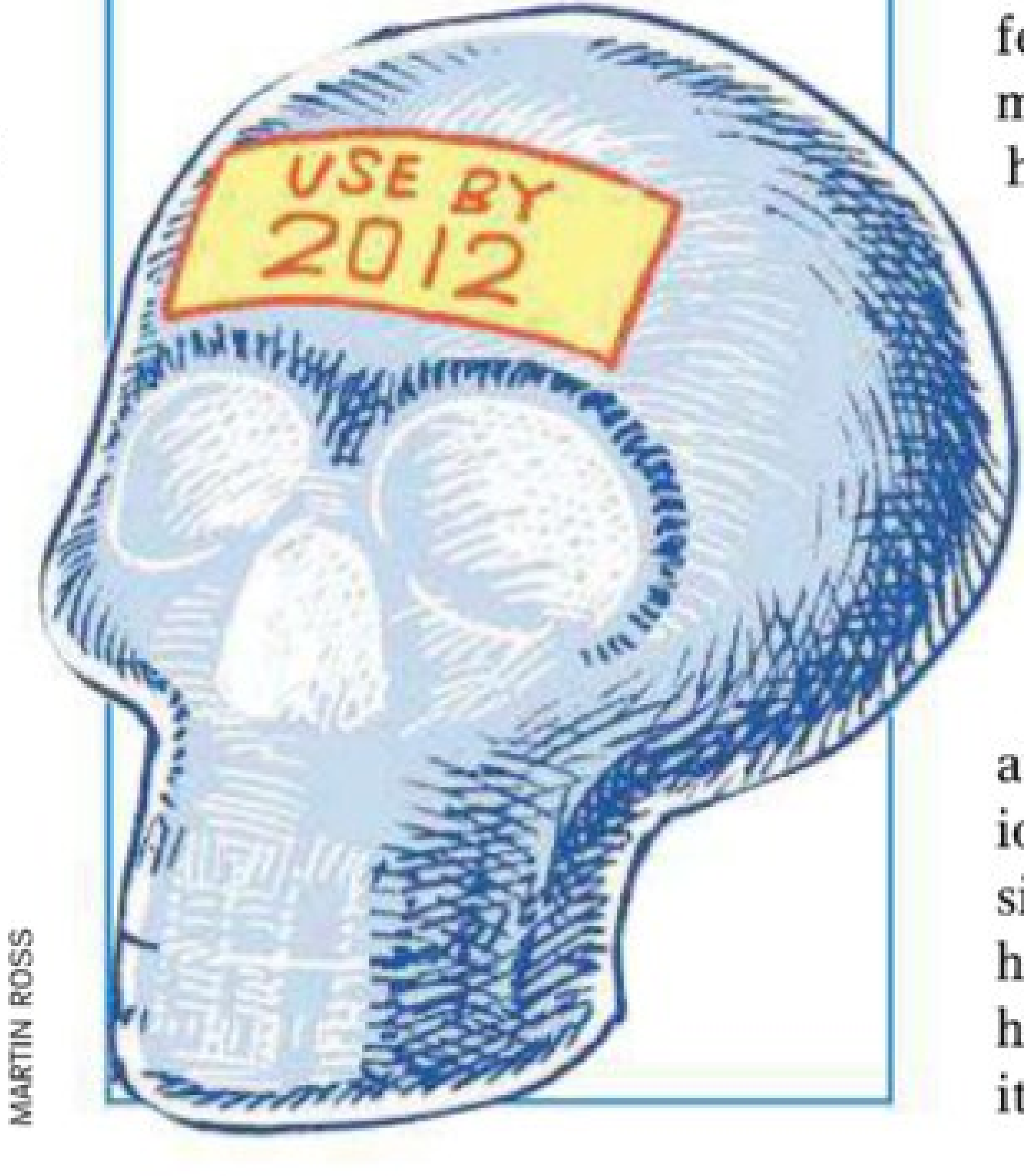
Dumitru Zvanca, 58, was planting potatoes in Botosani, Romania, when a meteorite thudded into the ground inches away. The 3in (8cm) black rock, "like a pool ball", sank almost 2ft (60cm) into the earth. Meanwhile Alfreda Lewandowska, whose cowshed was hit by a meteorite, was making a fortune by selling the rock for £50 a gram from her farm in Soltmany, Poland. She hoped to make £40,000. *Sun, 14 May; Metro, 17 May 2011.*

BANG ON TARGET

Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) scheduled the 14th season of *South Park* so that the episode "It's a Jersey Thing" – which culminates in Osama bin Laden being shot by American operatives – screened on the day that Osama was killed. *Time Off (Brisbane), 4 May 2011.*

HIMMLER'S TREASURE

A 20lb (9kg) crystal skull said to have belonged to Otto Rahn [**FT273:28–34**, **274:40–45**] and then Heinrich Himmler has been found in a Bavarian village, in the attic of an old lady once married to a senior SS officer. It is now in the hands of Swiss journalist Luc Burgin, who says it is Mayan, one of 13 from Mexico "where legend [!] has it, the skulls are vital to stop the world ending next year" – it says here. *Bild (Germany), 6 Mar; Daily Mirror, 10 Mar 2011.*



MARTIN ROSS

Durham is humming

A noise like a distant engine at one end of northern village

Since April this year, the village of Woodland in County Durham (pop. 300) has been plagued by an unidentified sound. Residents claim a noise permeates the air similar to the throb of a distant diesel engine. Some witnesses have described it as a humming or growling noise. It is said to be constant from midnight until 4am every night and stops its victims sleeping. There are no pylons or factories nearby.

"It starts about 11pm but can be as early as 9pm," said Marylin Grech, 57, a retired store detective. "It's like a throbbing with a hum behind it and it's loudest on Sundays. In certain areas of the house you can hear it more loudly. It is definitely from outside, it's in the air, all around, very faint. It vibrates through the house. It's a bit like a fridge but it definitely isn't my fridge. We've turned all the electricity off and we can still hear it. Sometimes we'll be in bed and it vibrates right through our bed. It's not tinnitus, that's a high-pitched sound and this is very low. If I put my fingers in my ears it stops, so I know it's not in my head. We have disused mines round here and it think it might be something to do with that. At 4am it's so clear, because we live in such an isolated place with no traffic, it's heaven. But it leaves a buzzing in your head for the rest of the day."

Another resident, who preferred not to be named, said her mother has suffered from the hum for years. "With her, it's just inside the house. Me, my daughter, we've all heard it."

Residents who hear the hum are allegedly all at one end of the village; residents at the other end have never heard it and some suspect it to be subjective. Dr Geoff Levenhall, an expert in noise and vibration who has been investigating similar hums for 40 years, admits he has never heard the sound himself, although he did capture it on tape once. Gary Hutchinson, an environmental protection manager at Durham County Council, said: "I can confirm that we received a call regarding a humming sound in the Woodland area on June the first and we will now make further enquiries before deciding what action we will take."

NNP / PAUL KINGSTON

ABOVE: Local resident Marilyn Grech finds that the hum disappears when she sticks her fingers in her ears.

"It leaves a buzzing in your head for the rest of the day"

Various neighbourhoods around the world have been afflicted with unidentifiable throbbing and humming noises. The most famous in the UK was "the Bristol Hum" in the 1970s when more than 2,000 people complained of a consistent drone causing nosebleeds, sleeplessness and headaches. It continues to affect some local people to this day. The Scottish town of Largs was afflicted by a hum throughout the 1990s. Then there's the Auckland North Shore Hum that plagued New Zealanders in 2006, and the Bondi Buzz, sounding like a combination of truck engine and industrial fan, that infuriated residents in Australia's normally laid-back surf neighbourhood in 2009. *D.Telegraph, 10+17 June; Independent, 18 June 2011.*

- For other hums and drones, see **FT19:23** (Herefordshire 1975); **65:12–13** (Hueytown, Alabama, 1991–92); **71:12** (Taos, New Mexico, 1991–93); **85:13** (Cornwall, 1995); **162:26** (Kokomo, Indiana, 1999–2002); **242:17** (Sudbury, Suffolk; Loch Ness; Green Bay, Wisconsin, 2008). A similar phenomenon is the "hummadruz" (hum+drone+buzz) with cases dating back to 1727 (**FT29:54, 98:52, 115:28–31, 118:52–53, 120:50+52, 121:52**).

Supernatural scares

Argentina's duende and a South African 'monkey witch'

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

GNOME SCARE

A violent *duende* (gnome or elf), with pointy ears and wearing a pointy hat, has been terrorising the Argentinean town of Suncho Corral. It is said to have made up to a dozen brutal attacks on children and old men. One of the first victims was a 14-year-old boy in May. "A source" said: "He crossed by a dark area at the back of a school when he was hit from behind by the creature known as The Dwarf or Shorty-Eared One. He was finally able to get away from its clutches." A cyclist was also punched off his bike by the creature. It then barred his way and said: "You shall not pass through here," before beating him senseless. The local police have received so many frightened calls that they've issued a state of alarm, warning residents not to venture out alone after dark.

Local priest Juan Cruz Fariña told Spanish language news site *Rosario3* that he believed the creature to be "a work of magic". "The Church could attempt an exorcism in an effort to expel demons from the possessed body," he said, but then added: "Nothing about this case suggests a possession. It could be many other things, such as fanciful imaginings or confusion by the people of Suncho. I therefore ask everyone to take matters calmly and above all, to have faith in God. There is an explanation to all phenomena." *Sun, 18 June 2011.*

- Back in March 2008, a group of teenagers in the town of General Guemes in northern Argentina encountered a gnome-like figure at one in the morning and managed to film it on a mobile phone before running off in fright. Others came forward to say they had spotted the figure, which moved sideways in short hops [**FT235:4**]. It was reminiscent of the pointy-hatted gnomes of Germanic folklore, made famous by the Dutch artist Rien Poortvliet (1932–95). Strange imps, goblins and other diminutive creatures are well known in the annals of South American ufology. Other ostensibly paranormal creatures in Argentina include the *lobizon* (werewolf) [**FT138:6**]; the *mapinguari* (variously described as a man-like beast or a giant ground sloth) [**FT77:17, 173:6, 232:16**]; and *el loco tejado* (the "rooftop madman" of 2005, akin to Spring-heeled Jack or India's "monkey man") [**FT198:4**].

A boy was hit from behind by the 'Shorty-Eared One'

MONKEY WITCH

When a vervet monkey wandered into Kagiso, a township west of Johannesburg in South Africa, on 23 May, a rumour went round that it was "talking to people". Residents shouted "kill that witch!" and pelted it with stones. The animal fled the mob and found shelter in a tree, but was pulled down, put in a bucket and dowsed in petrol. Kagiso resident Tebogo Moswetsi told the *Star* newspaper: "I was curious to see this monkey that people claimed could talk, and when I saw a group of people chasing after it, I joined them. When it went up the tree, I climbed after it and brought it down because I was curious as I found it unbelievable that a monkey could talk. I feel guilty. I shouldn't have taken it down from that tree. I dropped it down after someone poured petrol on it. I had no choice. Someone struck a match. [The monkey] got out of the bucket and dropped down dead. They continued throwing stones at it."

Johannes Bapela, another Kagiso resident, was upset and called Cora Baily, manager of CLAW (Community-led Animal Welfare). She arrived to find a large crowd gathered round the remains of the burning monkey. "I felt devastated," she said. "You could barely tell it had been a living creature. There were very small children who looked very confused and frightened." She explained that many people didn't understand that such animals wander into townships because their natural habitat was destroyed or they have been separated from their troop. *[SAPA] Star (South Africa), 30 May; globalpost.com, 1 June 2011.*

SIDELINES...

LUNCHTIME LEGEND

A small lizard served in rural restaurants in Vietnam's southern province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau is an all-female species that reproduces by parthenogenesis (self-fertilisation). *Leiolepis ngovantrii* was previously unknown to science even though it has been eaten in the Mekong Delta for centuries. *[CNN] 11 Nov; Independent, 12 Nov 2010.*

SECRET POST BOXES

Radio presenter David Heathcote, 61, wrote to Royal Mail asking where he could find post boxes in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire so he could post letters to his listeners. He received a reply from a "Freedom of Information Support Officer" saying that he could not be told precise locations of post boxes because doing so would "undermine their commercial value", and there was "significant public interest" in keeping the information private. *D.Telegraph, 28 April 2011.*

DO I KNOW YOU?

Tara Fall of Iowa suffers from prosopagnosia, a rare condition also known as "face blindness". If she looks away from you for a minute, she will not recognise you when she looks back. To recognise her children when she collects them from school, she has to remember how they were dressed that morning. *MX News (Sydney), 6 May 2011.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

ANCIENT ALBATROSS

The oldest known wild bird in the US, a roughly 60-year-old albatross named Wisdom, hatched a chick in February on Sand Island in Midway Atoll in the North Pacific. She was first tagged aged about five in 1956 as she was incubating an egg. Since then, she has logged about three million flying miles, the equivalent of six round trips to the Moon. *[R] 10 Mar 2011*.

RIPPING A NEW HOLE

A farmer from China's Hubei Province named Wu was born with congenital anal atresia and lived 55 years without an anus, although he had a 0.5cm diameter surgical hole, or stoma, through which he could squeeze out stools with his hands. He lived on laxatives, which left him very thin, but he married and had children. In January, Dr Li Zhibiao at Wuhan Hospital reshaped a new fundament for him – and three days later he could excrete normally. *Wuhan Morning News, via Global Times, 6 Mar 2011*.

RUFF SEA RESCUE

On 1 April, the crew of a coastguard helicopter rescued a dog that had spent three weeks at sea in the wake of Japan's earthquake and tsunami of 11 March. They spotted the animal trotting round the roof of a house that was swept out to sea. Television showed an aerial view of a brown, medium-sized dog on the roof, the only part of the house floating above water. *NY Daily News, Irish Independent, 2 April 2011*.

HUMAN CHEESE

In May, a New York gallery was offering the public cheese made from human breast milk. The Lady Cheese Shop was a temporary art installation by Miriam Simun, who hoped to raise questions about the ethics of biotechnology. Three varieties on offer were West Side Funk, Midtown Smoke and Wisconsin Chew. "Some people are loving it and some people are gagging," she said. For human ice cream, see **FT275:20**. *(Sydney) MX News, 3 May 2011*.

TIMELESS TRIBE

NOT ALL CULTURES SHARE OUR CONCEPTS OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

The Amondawa people, an Amazonian tribe from Brazil, have no concept of time or dates. They have no words for "time", "week", "month" or "year", only divisions of day and night and rainy and dry seasons, according to research directed by Chris Sinha, a professor of psychology of language at the University of Portsmouth, and published in the journal *Language and Cognition*. Prof. Sinha argues that it is the first time scientists have been able to prove that time is not a deeply entrenched universal human concept, as previously thought. "We can say without doubt that there is at least one language and culture which doesn't have a concept of time as something that can be measured, counted or talked about in the abstract," he said. "This doesn't mean the Amondawa are 'people outside time', but they live in a world of events, rather than seeing events as embedded in time."

The team, which included a linguist, Wany Sampaio, and an anthropologist, Vera da Silva Sinha, spent eight weeks with the tribe. Nobody in the community has an age; instead, they change their names to reflect their life stage and position in their society. For example, a small child will give up his or her name to a newborn sibling and take on a new one. There is no "mapping" between concepts of time passage and movement through space. Ideas such as an event having "passed" or being "well ahead" of another are familiar

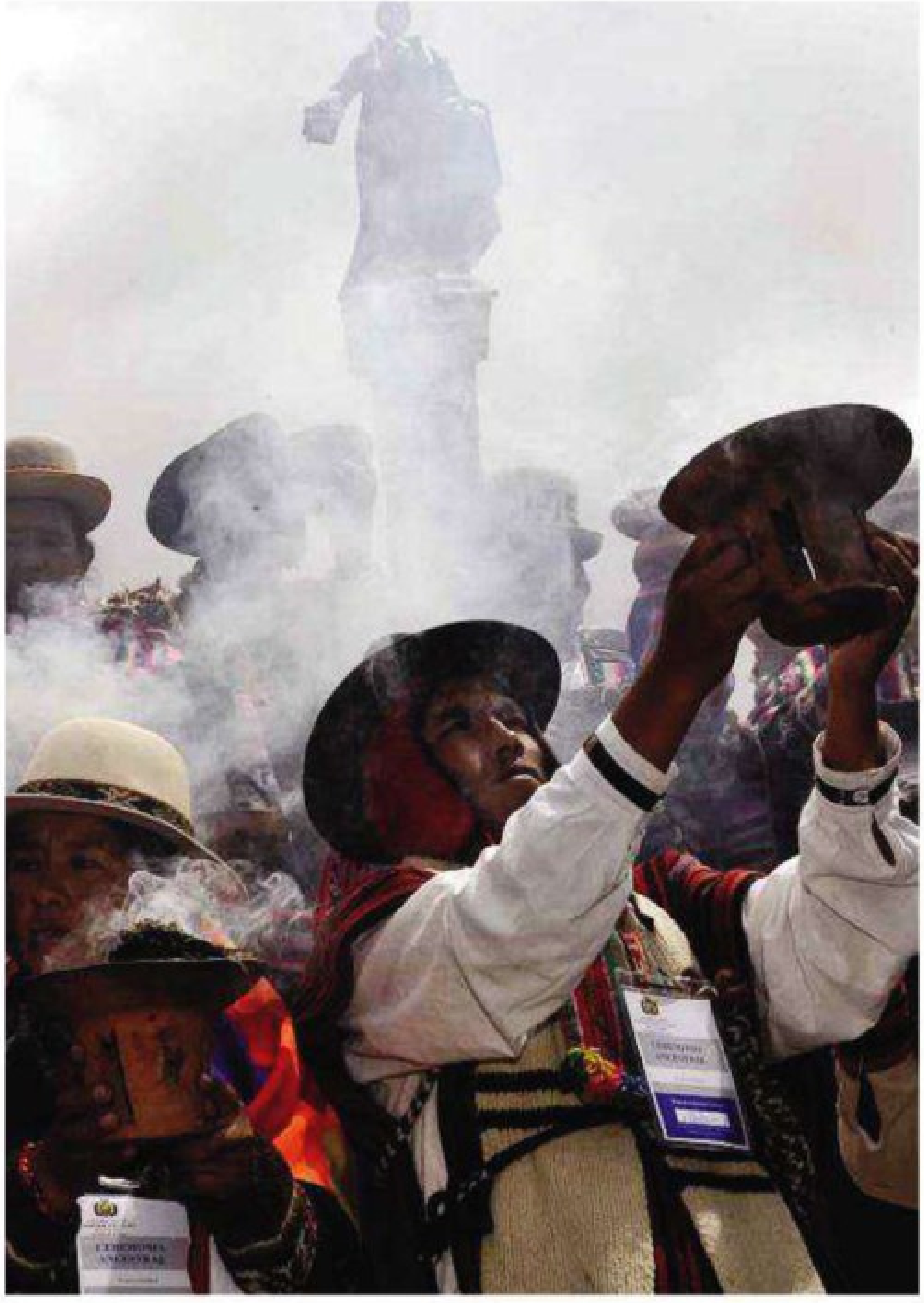
NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE INDIANS

ABOVE: The unidentified Amazonian tribe are believed to have a language from the pano group and grow plantations of corn and plantain near their straw-covered 'maloca' huts.

ISOLATED TRIBE FOUND

The Brazilian government has confirmed the existence of an uncontacted tribe in a south-western area of the Amazon rainforest. Three large clearings in the area had been identified by satellite, but the population's existence was verified only after aerial expeditions in April gathered more data, according to the National Indian Foundation, the government agency known by its Portuguese acronym, FUNAI. Brazil has a policy of not contacting such tribes, but working to prevent the invasion of their land to preserve their autonomy. FUNAI estimated that 68 isolated populations live in the Amazon.

The most recently identified tribe, thought to number about 200, live in four large straw-roofed buildings and grow corn, bananas, peanuts and other crops. The population probably belongs to the pano language group, which extends from the Brazilian Amazon into the Peruvian and Bolivian jungle. The community is near the border with Peru in the large Vale do Javari reservation, which is nearly the size of Portugal and is home to between 14 and 22 tribes, amounting to an estimated population of 2,000, probably the largest uncontacted group in the world. Their culture is threatened by illegal fishing, hunting, logging and mining, along with deforestation by farmers, missionary activity, oil exploration and drug trafficking along Brazil's borders. *[AP] 23 June 2011*.



RIGHT: A celebration by the people of Aymara, where the future lies behind.

FACING PAGE: Researchers with a mother and her children in 'timeless' Amondawa.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / AIZAR RALDES

from many languages, forming the basis of what is known as the "mapping hypothesis"; but in the Amondawa language, no such concepts exist. "None of this implies that such mappings are beyond the cognitive capacities of the people," said Prof. Sinha; "it's just that it doesn't happen in everyday life." When the Amondawa learn Portuguese, they have no problem acquiring and using these mappings from the language.

"We have so many metaphors for time and its passing," said Prof. Sinha. "We think of time as a 'thing' – we say 'The weekend is nearly gone', 'She's coming up to her exams', 'I haven't got the time', and so on, and we think such statements are objective, but they aren't. We have created these metaphors and they have become the way we think. The Amondawa don't talk like this and don't think like this, unless they learn another language. For these fortunate people, time isn't money, they aren't racing against the clock to complete anything, and nobody is discussing next week or next year," said Prof. Sinha. "You could say they enjoy a certain freedom."

First contacted in 1986, the Amondawa continue their traditional way of life, hunting, fishing and growing crops. But now, along with trappings of modernity such as electricity and television, they have gained Portuguese, putting their own language under threat of extinction. *BBC News, 20 May; D.Telegraph, 21 May 2011.*

The Aymara people map time in the opposite way

Another South American tribe have a concept of time opposite to the rest of the world, so that the past lies ahead of them and the future behind, according to a study by Rafael Nunez, professor of cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego, and Berkeley linguistics professor Eve Sweetser, published in the journal *Cognitive Science* in June 2006. The language of the Aymara, who live in the Andes highlands of Bolivia, Peru and Chile, has been noticed by Europeans since the earliest days of the Spanish conquest. A Jesuit wrote in the early 17th century that Aymara was particularly useful for abstract ideas, and in the 19th century it was dubbed the "language of Adam". Umberto Eco has praised its capacity for neologisms, and there have even been contemporary attempts to harness the so-called "Andean logic" – which adds a third option to the usual binary system of true/false or yes/no – to computer applications. However, Prof. Nunez said no one had previously detailed the Aymaras' "radically different metaphoric mapping of time".

Prof. Nunez collected about 20 hours of conversations with 30 Aymara adults from northern Chile that included discussions of past and future events. The Aymara language recruits *nayra*, the basic word for "eye", "front" or "sight", to mean "past"; and *qhipa*, the basic word for "back" or "behind", to mean "future". Thus the expression *nayra mara* ("last year") can be literally translated as "front year". Elderly Aymara referred to the future by thumbing or waving over their shoulders and swept forward with their hands and arms for now or the near past – and further out, to the full extent of the arm, for ancient times. In other words, they used gestures identical to the ones familiar in the rest of the world – only in reverse. *PhysOrg.com, 12 June; D.Telegraph, 13 June 2006.*

SIDELINES...

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Szijjarto Csaba, a house painter from Martinka in Hungary, discovered a cross-shaped root at a building site five years ago. There was a fragment of a stone near it, with a cross carved on it. "I was convinced that Jesus has sent me these signs," he said. "Earlier I was a drunkard, a chain-smoker and gambled away my money. After I found these signs, I got rid of my harmful addictions." *Bors (Hungary), 24 Jan 2011.*

SKY DOG

Nurses from an old people's home near Vancouver saw a tiny white poodle drop from the sky, released from the talons of a bird of prey. She had claw marks on her back and broken ribs from the fall, her nails had grown into her paw pads and her teeth were decayed. *MX News (Sydney), 17 May 2011.*

LENNON STILL COMPOSING

Mike Powell, 56, a retired printer from Abergele, North Wales, with no musical ability, claims the ghost of John Lennon has taught him new songs. He has recorded 50 of the 350 tunes he claims the late Beatle has written in the afterlife, and sent them to Yoko Ono. *Metro, 31 May 2011.*

MARTIN ROSS

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SIDELINES...

HOT GUESTS

Small ad noticed in Devon's *Tavistock Times* on 2 June 2011: "SINGLE OVEN with pull out guest bed, makes two singles or one. Kingsize with metal headboard £45 ovno..."

EATS OWN FINGER

A depressed 28-year-old New Zealand man cut off one of his little fingers with a jigsaw, then cooked and ate it with vegetables in an apparent attempt to get doctors to take him more seriously. The case from 2009 is said to be one of only eight documented cases in the world of self-cannibalism. *Australasian Psychiatry, 15 April; New Zealand Herald, 16 April 2011*.

PRECARIOUS PERCH

Baffled shoppers in the Chinese city of Lanzhou couldn't work out where the snoring was coming from until a shoe hit someone on the head and they looked up to see a homeless woman curled up fast asleep on a narrow tree branch 20ft (6m) up. *(Sydney) MX News, 6 May 2011*.

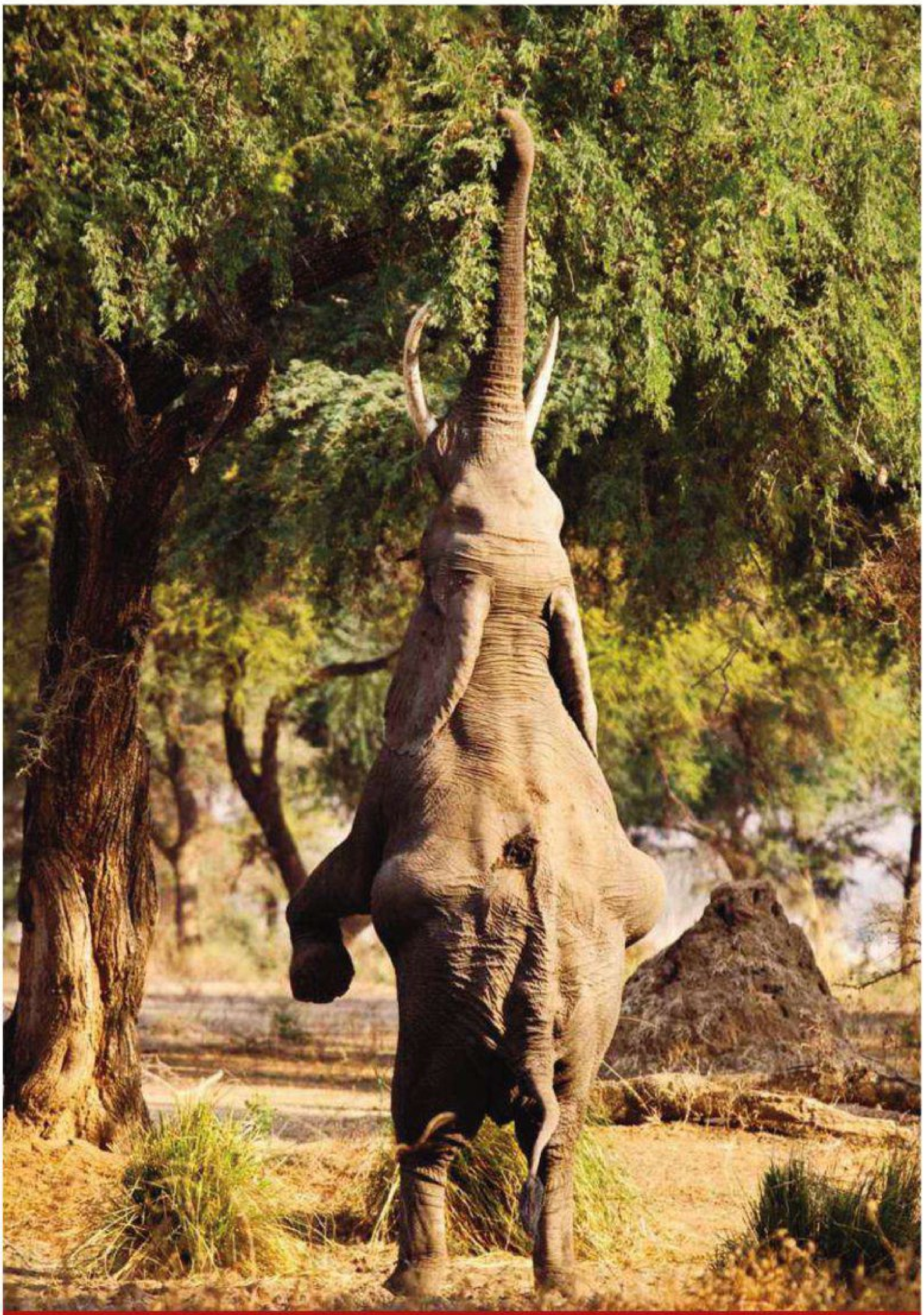
PUPPY RESURRECTION

Five terrier cross puppies were abandoned outside an animal shelter in Sulphur, Oklahoma, and it was decided to put them down. They were injected in the foreleg and heart, tested with a stethoscope to check they were dead, and their bodies put in the shelter's rubbish bin. The following morning, 26 February, one was found alive. He was dubbed Wall-E and celebrated on Facebook; 3,000 people offered to adopt him, and he was flown to New York to appear on *Good Morning America. Guardian, 18 Mar 2011*.

CHIMP ON THE LOOSE

Polish police were sceptical when three men claimed that an ape had attacked them, but members of the public in the southern town of Bielawa also reported seeing a primate, believed to have been a chimpanzee. At the time of the report, it was still at large. *D.Telegraph, 7 April 2011*.

QUITE A STRETCH...



SOLENT NEWS & PHOTO AGENCY / ETIENNE OOSTHUIZEN

This resourceful 40-year-old male elephant in Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia, has leaned how to stand on his hind legs to pick the pods from the top of the tree. He is the only one in his herd to have learnt the trick, said photographer Etienne Oosthuizen. "Not a lot goes to waste," he said. "Other elephants who are too young or small to reach follow this guy around to get at any scraps he may leave." The camp manager commented: "The elephants mostly shake the tree to get at these pods." Sub editors had fun with terrible puns over this story – "haute cuisine", "high tea", "snout of reach", and "elephantastic". *Metro, D.Express, D.Mirror, 17 Sept 2010.*

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MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

TALKING WITH ANIMALS

Everyone has encountered the pet that can "understand everything we say" but, asks **DAVID HAMBLING**, what language skills can other species really attain?

The dream of speaking to animals runs from Sigurd in Norse mythology right up to Dr Dolittle. Some researchers have claimed that they can actually do it, by teaching their subjects sign language or another mutually comprehensible means of communication. These included famous chimps like Nim and Washoe and the gorilla Koko. A few years ago, we were on the brink of a breakthrough in inter-species communications – so what happened?

Wittgenstein famously commented that if a lion could talk, we would not be able to understand it.[1] He believed that different 'forms of life' would have such different viewpoints that there could not be any common ground. We might exchange phrases like "there are two zebras over there", but cannot hope to understand lion ethics or æsthetics, or even know what 'zebra' really means to a lion. Think how hard it is for non-enthusiasts to 'get' a football fan's enthusiasm and multiply by a million.

A few years later, the linguist Noam Chomsky suggested that language is an innate human skill and that we share an in-built 'universal grammar' common to all human languages. Animals, lacking this grammar, would not be able to communicate in the same way. By way of challenge, in 1967 Allen and Beatrix Gardner set about teaching a chimpanzee called Washoe to talk.

Washoe was given a highly stimulating environment, with toys, games, books and friends to play with. In many ways, she was treated like a human child, and had four main human companions who stayed with her for many years. Originally based in Washoe County, Nevada, she was later moved to the Central University of Washington.

PROJECT NIM (2011), DIR. JAMES MARSH / UK RELEASE 12 AUG 2011

Washoe's carers communicated with each other in sign language, and she gradually picked it up herself, learning over 350 words. There are many anecdotal accounts of her language skill; she made up her own combination words, such as using the signs for "water" and "bird" when she saw a swan. Washoe lived until 2007, but research had moved on.

A second project in 1973 called "Nim Chimpsky" aimed at a more rigorous scientific approach. Like Washoe, Nim (above) learned a significant vocabulary in sign language and could, for example, point to or ask for a banana or yoghurt. Meanwhile, in Project Koko, a lowland gorilla learned over a thousand words and is also credited with combining 'water and 'bird' to describe a duck landing on a lake. These apes also proved capable of teaching others sign language and using it among themselves.

Critics objected that this was simple signing, and that neither Nim nor Washoe had any grasp of grammar in spite of the researchers' claims. It looked more like conditioning, learning that a certain action brings a reward without any deeper understanding. And a closer look at film of the chimps producing what might be taken as intelligent communication showed something else: "The frame-by-frame analysis revealed trainers unconsciously prompting and modelling each word, and Nim imitating. Unaware of their own prompting, the trainers had credited Nim with producing sentences."[2]

Nim learned a significant vocabulary and could ask for different foods

In 1980, Thomas Sebeok, a linguist at Indiana University and sceptic on ape language, organised a conference to review work in this field called "The Clever Hans Phenomenon: Communications with Horses, Whales, Apes and People". Clever Hans, the 19th-century German horse and calculating prodigy, lost his calculating powers when there was nobody around for him to pick up cues from. Sebeok suggested that similar effects were at work in the ape communications field, and that there was self-deception among researchers over just how well their subjects were communicating.

"Give orange me give eat orange me eat orange give me eat orange give me you," was reportedly Nim's longest utterance. This certainly communicates something, and might work as a lyric, but it does look like signalling rather than language.

While the believers kept on believing – as always – the mainstream view moved sharply away. There was too much suspicion that researchers were simply seeing what they wanted to see.

Ape intelligence studies continue, such as the one involving Kanzi, a chimp who can make and use tools and communicate via a keyboard.[3] He's a remarkable chimp, but there are few who would claim that Kanzi can form grammatical sentences. "Get red ball," "ball get red" and "red ball get" are all the same.

Meanwhile, there is also work with other species. Forgetting questionable efforts such as the Bowlingual translator (which 'translates' dog barks into human language), there is the Cetacean Hearing and Telemetry (CHAT) programme. Denise Herzing of the Wild Dolphin Project in Florida is working on a device for divers to talk to dolphins in something resembling dolphinese. The device will be able to detect and analyse dolphin squeaks and generate noises in reply. The idea is that a diver plays a given sound which the dolphin will associate with an action like "play with seaweed", and that the dolphin will learn to use the sound itself.[4]

CHAT builds on previous dolphin efforts using underwater keyboards, and may one day be very useful for practical dolphin-human communications on the level of "get red ball". But however smart dolphins may be, there's little chance of a real conversation yet. As Hans and Nim and the others have shown, the risk is that when we think we're talking to them, they're just reflecting us and we're really talking to ourselves.

NOTES

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

2 The Animal Communication project: http://bit.ly/jgPA6K (acp.eugraph.com).

3 http://bit.ly/gHeXAA (greatapetrust.org).

4 http://bit.ly/jrOTwY (*New Scientist*).

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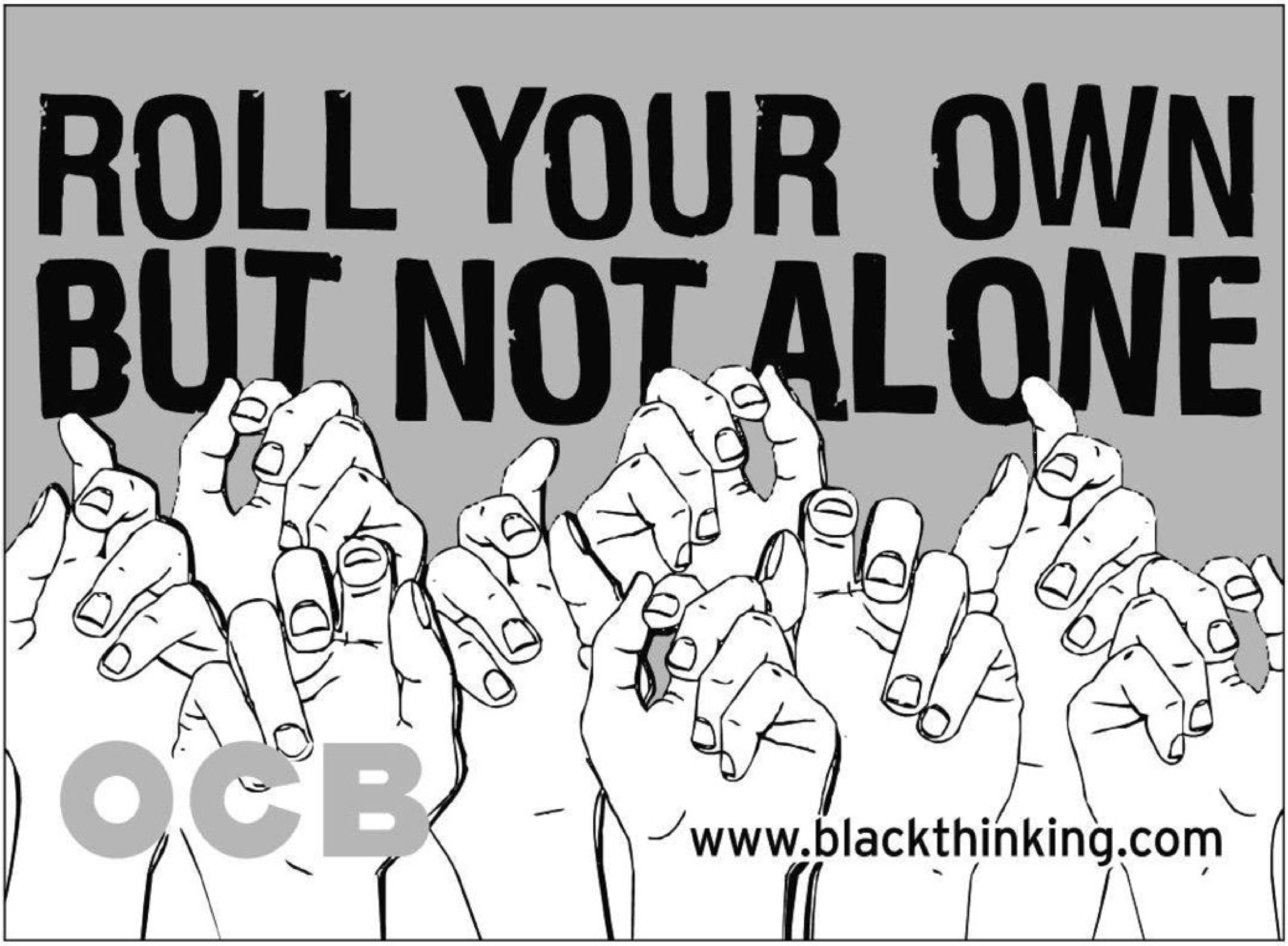

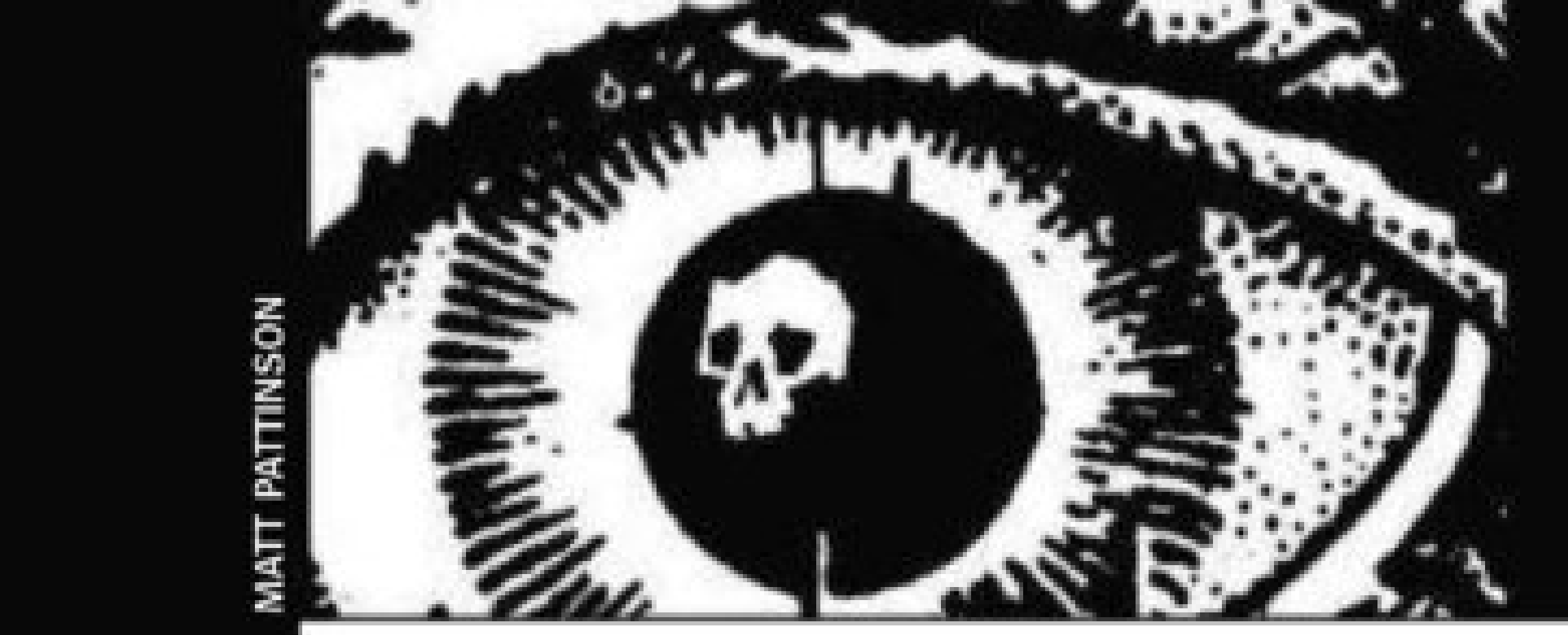

MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE rounds up the latest news of spooks and spirits.

PHANTOM PASSENGERS

Bus driver Vince Adams was shaken after two passengers who boarded his bus disappeared without getting off. At 11.05am one Saturday in September 2010, he left Barnstaple bus station in Devon with one passenger on the back seat and then picked up two more at Green Lanes shopping centre. He said they were "an elderly lady and a young man in a dark leather jacket carrying a bunch of red and white carnations. I asked the lady if she was going to the hospital. She just smiled, so I issued her a concessionary ticket. The young man showed me a day ticket, all scrumpled up, but the date was correct. He too never said a word and went to sit next to the elderly lady.

"I did not stop again between Green Lanes and North Devon Hospital and when I checked in my mirror they were still seated together. I pulled into the hospital stop and the stop bell rang. The passenger on the back seat came to the front and thanked me before getting off."

The odd pair had vanished. Mr Adams was so concerned he went into the hospital to see if he could find them. He also asked passers-by if they had noticed who left the bus. All witnesses said they only saw one passenger get off. "I was very shaken up," said Mr Adams, "but then I returned to the bus to find the concessionary ticket I had printed for the elderly lady was still in the machine."

Mr Adams, from Combe Martin, has been driving buses around North Devon for 11 years. Barnstaple bus drivers have reported other instances of unexplained phenomena, such as smelling cigar smoke on an empty bus and the stop bell ringing on a bus out of service. *North Devon Journal, 24 Feb 2011*.

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MEN SYNDICATION NORTH DEVON JOURNAL

LEFT: Bus driver Vince Adams was baffled and disturbed when two passengers seemed to vanish in the air.

BELOW: An enormous Black Dog on the attack.

An elderly lady and a young man sat on the back seat – but where did they go?

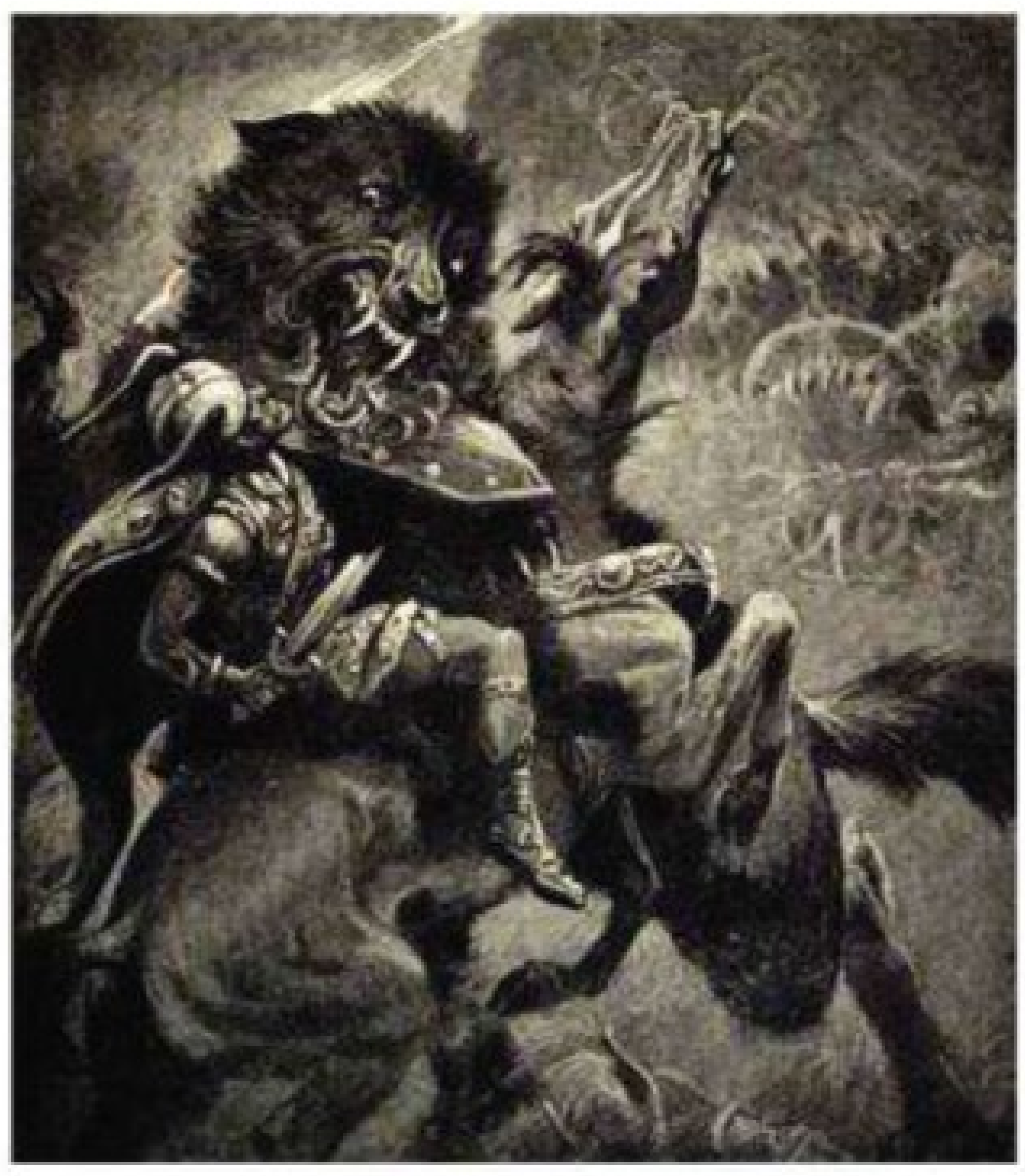
WHAT SPECIES IS THE BLACK DOG?

Back in 2009, I posed a question for a future line of research concerning the study by Dr Chris Sherwood of the University of Northampton into phantom Black Dogs; Dr Sherwood had witnessed one in his home as a child. More recently, the findings reported by Dr Karl Shuker concerning Anubis, identifying the Egyptian god of mummification not as a jackal but a species of wolf [**FT273:21**] raises questions about Britain's Black Dog apparitions. Following the re-interpretation of Anubis, might Black Dogs also be reclassified as wolves?

The Rev. C Kent considered the origins of Black Dogs to lie in the mediæval period when wolves existed in Britain, but most commentators favour an earlier Scandinavian origin. Norfolk antiquarian WG Clarke considered that Norfolk's Black Shuck was Odin personified as a dog; similarly James Wentworth Day identified the dog as the 'war hound of Odin'. However, Ivan Bunn of Lowestoft, who investigated Black Shuck ghosts in East Anglia [**FT17:12–13**, Aug 1976], considered Fenris the Wolf, who devoured the bodies of the slain on battlefields, was the only plausible candidate from Norse mythology, though he was far from convinced. Straying off along an even more eccentric tangent, Joan Forman suggested Black Shuck was not canine at all, but perhaps a race memory of early horses (*Haunted East Anglia*, 1974).

However, the possibility of any precise identification has been challenged by the late Jennifer Westwood and Dr Jacqueline Simpson in *The Lore of the Land* (2006). The authors argue that the Black Shuck in East Anglia falls into the general categories of 'Bogey-Beast' and shape-shifter rather than belonging to any fixed species. They note a wide variation of features in witness descriptions, variously likening features of the Shuck to a calf, a pony or a sheep; and sometimes the Shuck was "a Thing with Saucer eyes", headless or displayed human characteristics. Near Thetford, it transformed itself into a white rabbit with flaming eyes. Between West Wratting and Balsham, Cambridgeshire, the Shuck possessed the face of an ape, leading it to be called the "Shug-Monkey" or "Shuck-Monkey". In fact, this manifestation only seems to have been documented as late as 1954, arising from a letter from a Cambridge policeman to James Wentworth Day. Whether or not this was an attempt at making a monkey of Day, this fragment has appeared in ghost books ever since, also inspiring much cryptozoological speculation about hybrid species and the possibility of ghostly apes and apemen.

Sources: RC Kent: *Land of the Babes in the Woods*, 1910); James Wentworth Day: *Here are Ghosts and Witches*,1953; *In Search of Ghosts*, 1967; J Downes and R Freeman, *op. cit*).



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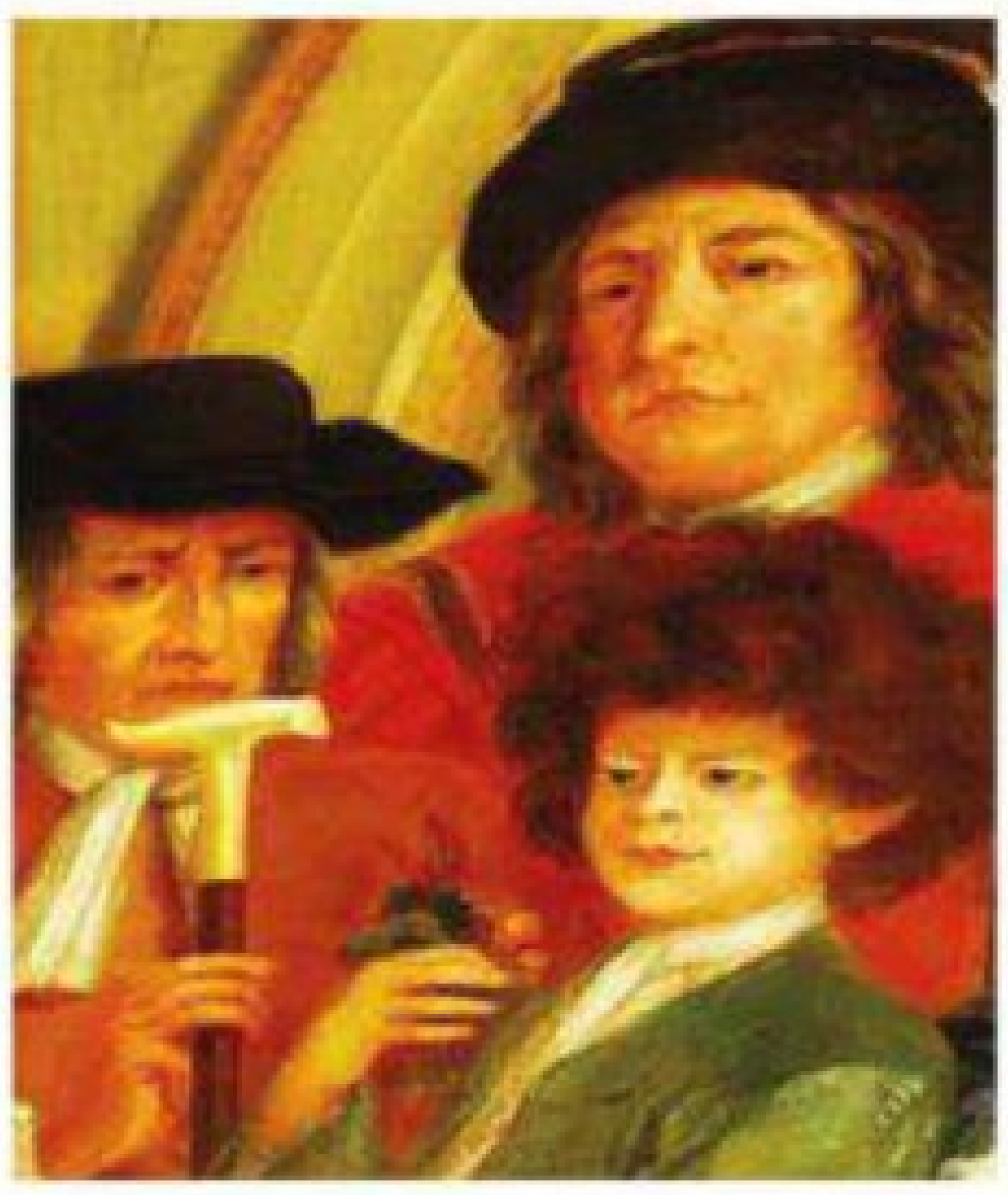


PETER THE WILD BOY [FT161:34–41]

FORTEAN TIMES
crimes of the
future

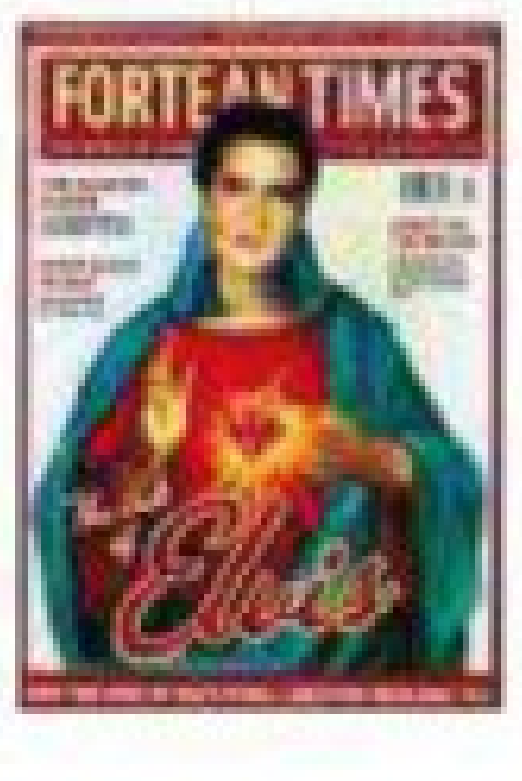
The first really famous feral child was Peter the Wild Boy, "a naked, brownish, black-haired creature" captured near Helpensen in Hanover on 27 July 1724, when he was about 12. He walked on all fours, climbed trees with ease, lived off plants and seemed incapable of speech. He refused bread, preferring to strip the bark from green twigs and suck on the sap; but he eventually learnt to eat fruit and vegetables. He was presented at court in Hanover to George I, and taken to England, where he was written about by Swift, Defoe and other men of letters. In his *Origin and Progress of Language*, Lord Monboddo presented the "Idiot Peter" as an illustration of his theory of the evolution of the human species. The King put the strange boy under the care of the court doctor, John Arbuthnot, and had him baptised, just in case he had a soul.

Peter spent 61 years in society, but never learnt to say anything except "Peter" and "King George", although his hearing and sense of smell were said to be "particularly acute". The King gave Peter to his daughter-in-law Caroline of Ansbach, who was interested in science and philosophy, and he lived on at court when she became queen. Following her death in 1737, he was sent to live on a farm in Hertfordshire owned by a retired courtier, where he lived into his 70s on a pension of £35 a year. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary's at Northchurch near Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. His simple gravestone reads: "Peter the Wild Boy 1785". To this day, an unknown person still places flowers on his grave.

Now Peter's charming smile, seen in his portrait in Kensington Palace painted in the 1720s by William Kent, has provided a clue to the condition that affected him. Lucy Worsley, the historian at Historic Royal Palaces who has been researching Peter's life, suspected from contemporary accounts that he was autistic. She showed the portrait (left) and gave a description of his physical characteristics and odd habits to Phil Beale, professor of genetics at the Institute of Child Health. Beale ran the symptoms through his database of chromosomal disorders and came up with a diagnosis of Pitt-Hopkins syndrome, first identified in 1978. Its most distinctive effect is clearly shown in the portrait, his curvy Cupid's bow lips. Other Pitt-Hopkins symptoms shared by Peter included short stature, coarse hair – the portrait shows him with a thick, curly mop – drooping eyelids and thick lips. He was also said to have two fingers fused together, which may have been clubbed fingers, also sometimes a symptom. His mental development would also have been affected, explaining why he ended up alone and naked in a forest.

Lucy Worsley's book *Courtiers*, which includes her research on Peter, is published by Faber & Faber. *Guardian, 21 Mar; D.Mail, 24 Mar 2011.*

LENKIEWICZ'S EMBALMED TRAMP [FT166:21]



From July to October this year, Torre Abbey in Torquay, Devon, is hosting "Death and the Maiden", an exhibition of work by the eccentric artist Robert Lenkiewicz (1941–2002). This will include several paintings of a tramp called Edwin MacKenzie, along with his body, embalmed by the artist. It is only the second time the body has been on show. After Lenkiewicz moved to Plymouth in 1964, he befriended as many as 700 vagrants, to whom he gave a home in nine warehouses. He was told about MacKenzie, a non-alcoholic vagrant from Chelson Meadow, a Plymouth rubbish tip, where his home was a corrugated pipe in the cleft of a tree on a hill. "I would go out and do watercolour studies of him," said Lenkiewicz. "He started coming to my studio and within weeks he was a permanent assistant and liked to refer to himself as my secretary. I nicknamed him Diogenes after the Greek philosopher who lived in a barrel." In 1978, they agreed in writing that when MacKenzie died, the artist would have his body embalmed, coated in transparent resin and displayed naked in his library as a *memento mori* [**FT50:56–57**]. MacKenzie died in November 1984 and was duly embalmed. Plymouth Council disputed his interpretation of "suitable arrangements" for the disposal of bodies under the Public Health Act of 1984, but Lenkiewicz had apparently not broken any law and refused to say where the body was. It was discovered in a cupboard drawer in his studio after his death.

Diogenes will be shown in a specially created vitrine in a small room within a room. This will be the second Lenkiewicz exhibition in the West Country this year – a larger exhibition is coming to an end at the Royal Western Academy in Bristol. "Lenkiewicz felt very protective of Mr MacKenzie and looked after him," said Amelia Marriette, Torbay Council's collections and exhibitions curator. "McKenzie used to sit outside his studio and charge people to go in, and Lenkiewicz was quite happy with that. He has been immortalised by the embalming. The body is hard, brown, almost like board and is quite fascinating. It wasn't as shocking as I thought it would be. He looks so frail, it's like a statue." *thisisdevon.co.uk, 30 May 2011.*

TURIN SHROUD [FT195:4]

ForteanTimes
Hell Hounds

The Shroud of Turin was the work of the great Italian painter Giotto di Bondone (1266/67–1337), according to a new book by Luciano Buso, a painter and art restorer from Treviso, near Venice. Buso claims to have found the signature "Giotto" hidden several times in the 14ft (4.2m) sepia burial cloth, as well as the number 15, which he sees as a reference to 1315, the year in which the artist was commissioned to create an exact copy of the relic, because the original was badly damaged after centuries of being taken round the Holy Land and Europe. "I have examined extremely clear photos of the Shroud and spotted a number of occurrences of the number 15, in the face, the hands, and in one case even shaped to look like a long cross," said Buso." He wasn't trying to fake anything, which is clear from the fact that he signed it 'Giotto 15', to authenticate it as his own work from 1315." Buso insists that at the time it was common practice for artists to insert partial dates into their works to guarantee their authenticity, and to avoid forgeries it was known only to a handful of people.

Unlike the Leonardo da Vinci attribution [**FT110:34–37, 111:28–31**], the 1315 date fits in with the 1988 carbon-dating results (between 1260 and 1390) [**FT51:4–7**] – although some scientists have claimed that these results could have been distorted by water damage, fire and restoration. Furthermore, chemical analysis of fibres by the Los Alamos chemist Raymond Rogers suggests the

Shroud is between 1,400 and 3,000 years old [**FT195:4, 249:5**].

Buso believes the original was indeed the sheet used to cover Christ's body, but that it disintegrated, was lost or burned sometime after the copy was made – though this will almost certainly remain unsupported supposition. He said Giotto's signatures had not been detected before because they were created by cryptic patterns of brushstrokes. Sceptics will no doubt say he has over-interpreted random patterns. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Independent, 8 June 2011.*

ROAMING RACCOONS [FT274:10]

ForteanTimes

After the raccoon sightings in Hampshire in February comes news of one from Ireland. A raccoon was spotted in Ballyvourney, southwest Cork, on 25 April. Householders, who didn't want to be named, had left out food for their cats. They took a photograph of the creature and its identity was confirmed by experts. Raccoons were introduced to parts of mainland Europe – but not to Ireland – for fur farming in the 20th century, but some escaped, or were deliberately released, into the wild. The Cork sighting prompted an "invasive species alert", as raccoons spread rabies and also carry a roundworm (*Baylisascaris procyonis*) that can be lethal to humans. *Irish Times, 6 May 2011.*

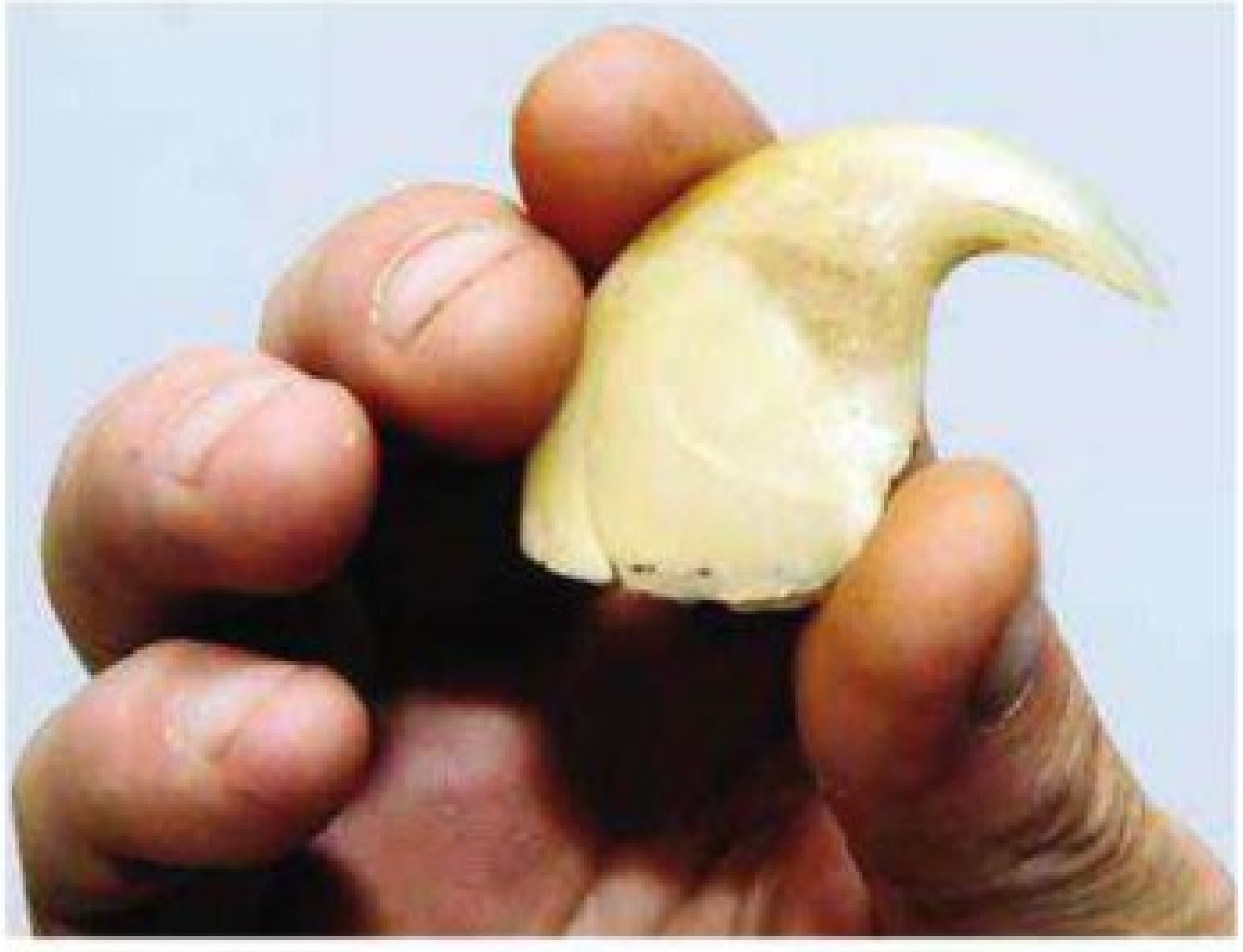
FLOATING FEET UPDATE [FT273:11]

ForteanTimes

More of the 10 severed feet washed up in the Pacific Northwest since 2007 have been identified: foot number three found on Valdez Island in the Strait of Georgia in February 2008, and foot number five found on Westham Island, the other side of the Strait, in June that year, both in Nike size 11 running shoes. On 24 May, the British Columbia Coroners' Service announced that they belonged to a 21-year-old man from the coastal city of Surrey, British Columbia, who had been reported missing four years earlier. *Times Colonist (Victoria, BC, Canada), 25 May 2011.*

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden



ABOVE: The large cat claw found in Lanarkshire, Scotland.

TRINITY MIRROR / WISHAW PRESS

CLAWING BACK A BIG CAT DISCOVERY

ABC sightings in the UK are two a penny nowadays, but physical evidence for their existence is much rarer, which is why the news of the discovery of what closely resembles the claw of a (very) big cat is so unusual and potentially significant. Although the find occurred four years ago, it has only now been made public. It was dug up on Greenhead Moss at Waterloo, near Wishaw, in north Lanarkshire, Scotland, by Angus Richie's dog while he was walking her there in 2007. Measuring 1.5in (3.8cm) long, curved, and very sharp, a close-up photo of it published in the *Wishaw Press* newspaper reveals that it is clearly feline but its size compares with that of a leopard, and in modern times the Wishaw region has been the scene of several sightings of an alleged black panther (melanistic leopard). Indeed, as recently as February 2011, another local dog-walker, Rod Miller, claimed to have seen a panther-like beast climbing down a tree on Greenhead Moss with a bird in its jaws. *http://bit.ly/lCF8eP (wishawpress.co.uk) 12 May 2011.*

WOWIE – IT'S A YOWIE!

Just before 2.30am on 17 May 2011, while driving south along the Pacific Highway north of Grafton in New South Wales, Australia, a professional driver identified in media reports only as Dean took the Centenary Drive bypass, and moments later he clearly saw in the middle of the road just up ahead what seemed at first to be a large person stooped over, wearing a big overcoat. But as his headlights illuminated it, this hitherto-bipedal entity dropped down onto all fours and swiftly bounded into the scrub fringing the road. Slowing down, Dean peered into the bushes, and saw the entity silhouetted against the sky. "It had an almost sort of a square, shaggy block head sitting straight on its shoulders – I'm a pretty big guy but it made me absolutely awestruck how huge its body was," he said. "It had its arm up against a tree and it had about a foot of hair hanging from under its biceps."

He estimated it was at least 6ft (1.8m) tall, and seemed to be covered in jet-black hair. At the time of his sighting, he had never heard of the yowie – Australia's very own supposed man-beast – but after he told colleagues, they said that his description was similar to those of previous yowie eyewitnesses. This is confirmed by Australian cryptozoologist Paul Cropper, whose website Dean consulted while investigating his remarkable sighting. *http://bit.ly/mlxV1s (dailyexaminer.com.au) 19 May 2011.*

DIGGING DEEP FOR THE DEVIL WORM

A zoological team has recently announced the discovery of a new species of microscopic nematode worm – an event that would not normally be considered momentous, since more than 28,000 nematode species have already been described, with researchers believing that there may be as many as a million species. What makes this one so very special, however, is that it appears to be the deepest-living multicellular animal known to science. It was found living in fracture water in a series of South African gold mines, at depths of 0.56–2.24 miles (901–3,605m) into the Earth's crust. Until now, such deep, inhospitable zones were not deemed capable of sustaining multicellular lifeforms due to the very high temperatures, immense pressure, confined space, and lack of oxygen. However, this newly revealed species has confounded the experts on all counts, so in recognition of its ability to survive in this infernal subterranean realm, where it feeds upon bacteria and reproduces sexually, it has been formally named *Halicephalobus mephisto*, and informally dubbed the devil worm of hell. *http://bit.ly/isSEyB (the-scientist.com) 1 June 2011.*

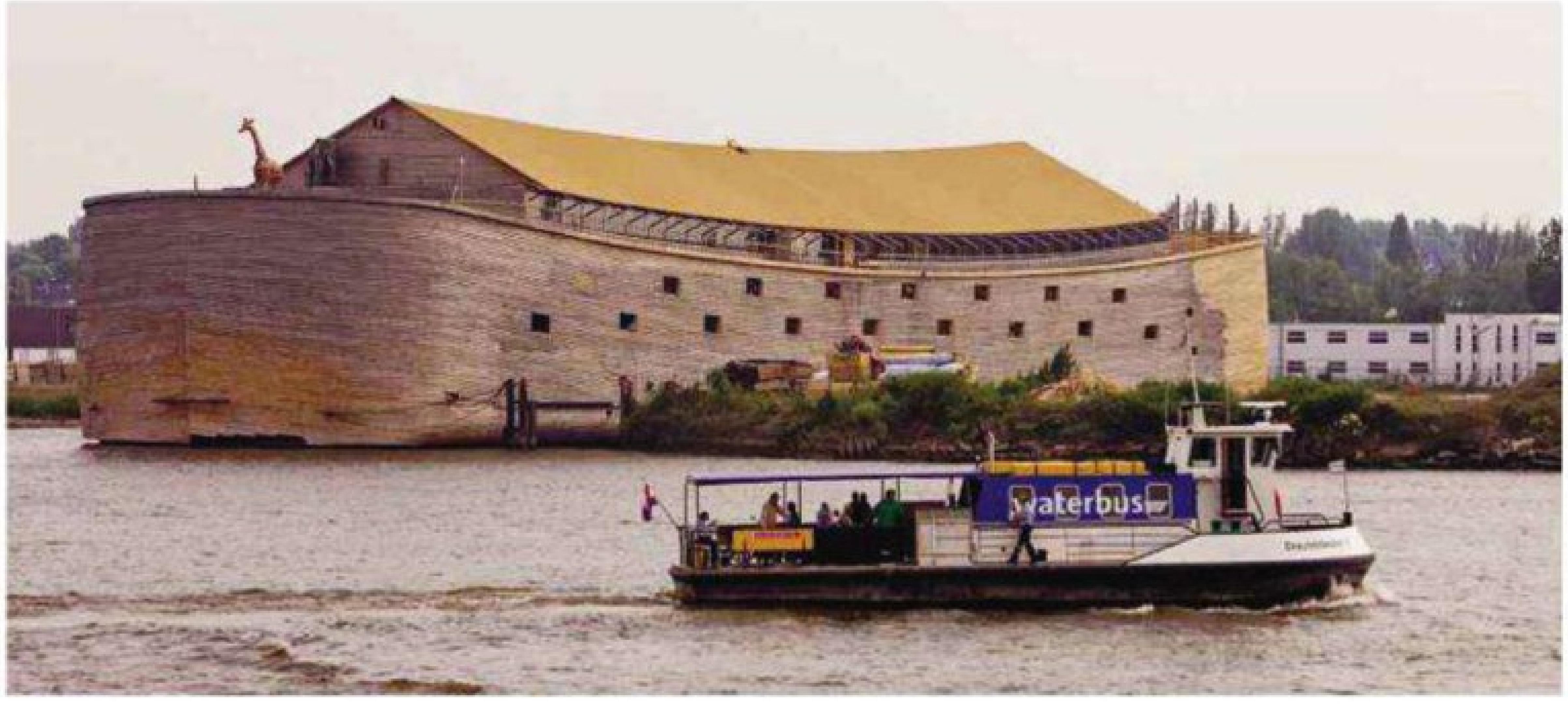
W DJATMIKO, CC ATTRIBUTION SHARE-ALIKE 3.0

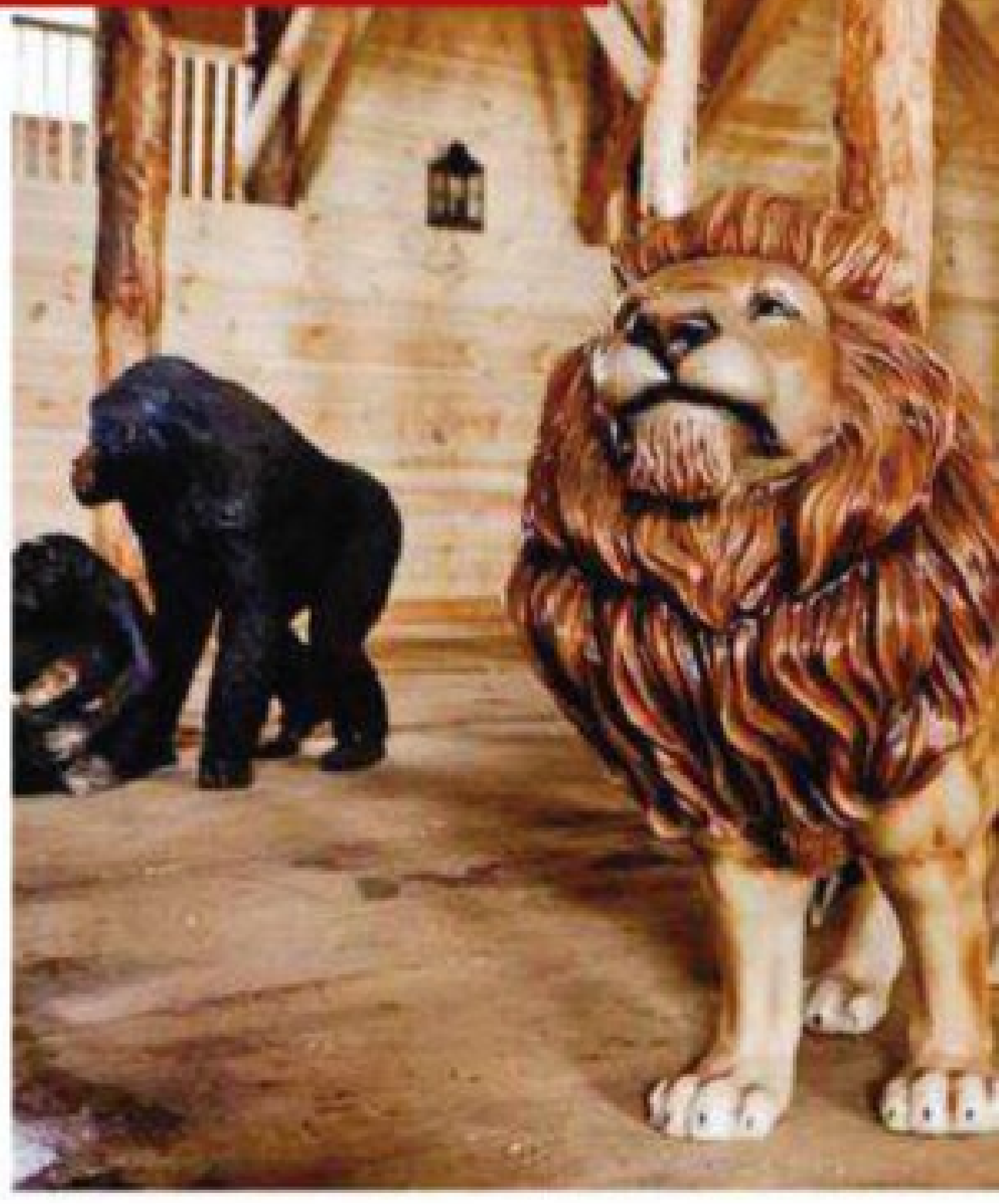
THE NAMELESS IN 'NAM

In the border districts of Si Ma Cai and Muong Khuong in Vietnam's northwestern Lao Cai province, people are repeatedly seeing mysterious dog-like beasts that no one has yet identified, even though they have bitten at least 15 people. Local residents claim that these canine cryptids have slanting red eyes, long slender bodies, and very distinctive coats patterned variously with black and white spots, just white spots, or yellow stripes. They are seen wandering through the villages as they attempt to prey upon domestic dogs or larger livestock such as pigs, goats and horses, and will also attack anyone who tries to ward them off. Their description brings to mind civets or some other large Asian viverrid, but their behaviour is much more aggressive and bold than is normal for such creatures. Whether these mystery beasts are related to (or even one and the same species as) the seemingly more elusive dog-killing animals repeatedly reported lately from the Binh Dong Commune of Binh Son District in central Vietnam's Quang Ngai province is as yet undetermined. With large (5–6in/13–15cm) footprints having been discovered in sand at the foot of Dinh Mountain and loud roaring sounds heard in the same region, however, an answer may soon be forthcoming. *http://bit.ly/kGa4QO (english.vietnamnet.vn) 12 May 2011.*

SAVING FOR A RAINY DAY

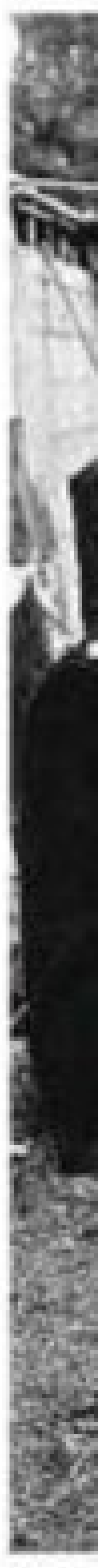
MODERN ARK-BUILDER AND SPECIES-HOARDER CLAIM TO BE DOING GOD'S WORK





NEW YORK TIMES / MICHEL DE GROOT / REDUX / EYEVINE

ABOVE LEFT: Johan Huibers's "life-size' replica of Noah's Ark, as described in Genesis, here in Dordrecht, Netherlands. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Animal models inside the Ark.

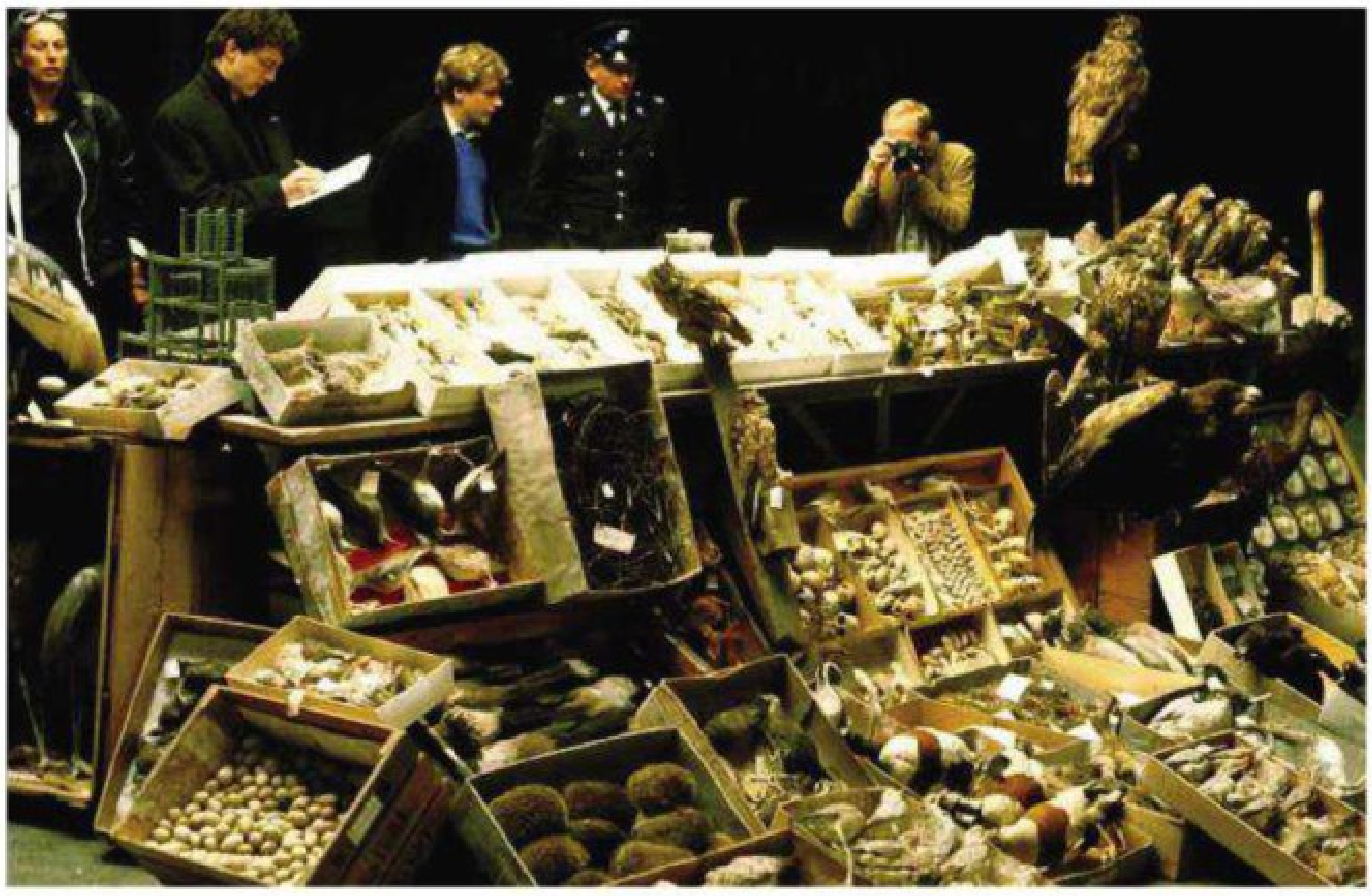


ARK FOR THE OLYMPICS?

A full-size recreation of Noah's Ark could be moored in the Thames during the Olympics next year. Johan Huibers, 60, an eccentric Dutch construction company owner, has spent around £1 million building it after dreaming about a great flood sweeping Holland. He saw the dream as a signal to spread God's message. The vessel is 450ft (137m) long and 75ft (23m) wide, following the dimensions given in the Bible – 300 cubits long, 50 wide and 30 high, the cubit being the length of the arm from the elbow to the tip of the little finger, interpreted by Huibers as 18in (46cm). He hopes to have the vessel finished by the middle of July, "maybe later". The lower deck will feature moving animal models, including a robot lion. Real animals, including sheep, will be kept on the second deck, with a raised viewing area for visitors, while an aviary with free-flying live birds will take up most of the enormous deck house. There will also be living quarters for Huibers and his wife.

Actually, this is not the first ark that Huibers has built. He first began dreaming of building one in 1992. His wife, Bianca, a police officer, opposed the idea. "She said no, but by 2004 I had built a smaller ark, 70 metres [230ft] long, to sail through the Dutch canals," he said. It became a minor sensation. He charged adult visitors 5 euros to board and made about 2.5 million euros, enough to clear a profit of 850,000 euros. However, it was not about money. "It is to tell people that there is a Bible," he said, "and that, when you open it, there is a God."

He started constructing his second ark on the river at Dordrecht, near Rotterdam, in 2008. It is built on 25 steel barges drawn together to form a basin. A heavy steel frame keeps it rigid. Asked about this, he replied: "It's much easier to make a wooden ark." However, modern safety requirements made the changes necessary. The 2,970-ton vessel holds two conference rooms capable of hosting 1,500 people. The timbers are Swedish pine, a choice Huibers made because God told Noah to use "resin wood". He was obliged to paint the wood, inside and out, with three coats of fire-retardant varnish. He recently wrote to Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, to ask for permission to bring his ark to London for the Olympic Games at the end of its maiden voyage. His application to dock in London has been referred to the Port of London Authority. *Int. Herald Tribune, 31 May; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, D.Express, 1 June 2011.*

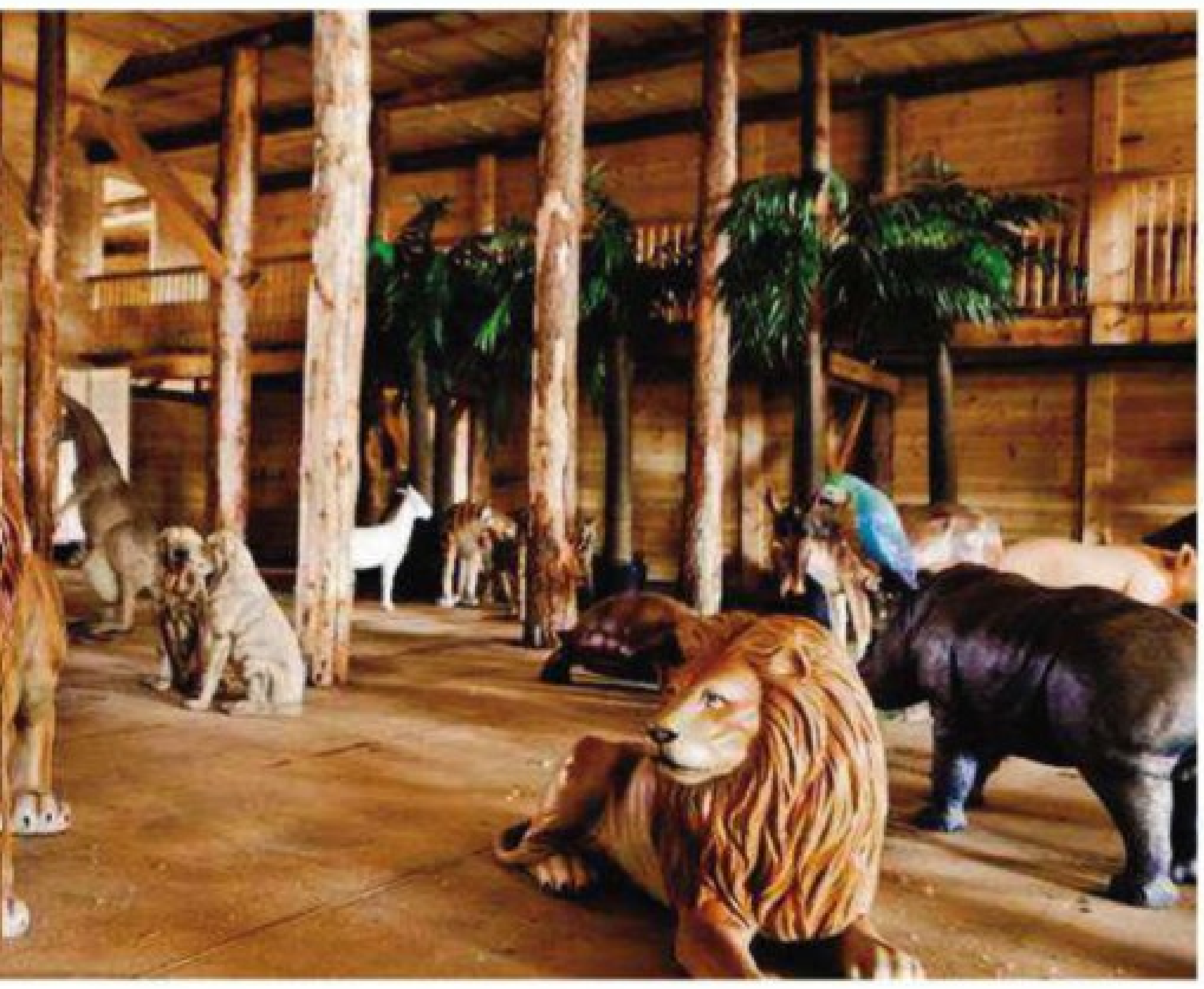


ANP / PAUL STOLK / PHOTOSHOT

PREPARING FOR THE END TIMES

Another Dutchman who fancied himself as Noah was John Roeleveld, who 30 years ago was living in Eerbeek, 55 miles (90km) east of Amsterdam. He said that God had instructed him to collect and mount two of every species in preparation for the imminent end of the world. Some time before 1942, God had promised him that his collection would rise up and live again after Judgment Day, and that the scrap iron fragments and old furniture that littered his garden would also be made new.

In April 1982, police raided Roeleveld's house in response to complaints and were astonished to find a rabbit warren of concrete bomb shelters that the 72-year-old had built in the backyard of his shabby home. In the shelters were an estimated 250,000 stuffed



NEW YORK TIMES / MICHEL DE GROOT / REDUX / EYEVINE

ANP / PAUL STOLK / PHOTOSHOT

ABOVE: John Roeleveld in Eerbeek, Netherlands, claimed God had instructed him to gather two of every species for the end of the world. **FACING, BOTTOM:** Police inspect the contents of his bunker.

animals and birds, including crocodiles, ostriches, kangaroos, panthers, apes, a bear, an elephant skull and a camel. Some had been stuffed in the 19th century, but most were the work of Roeleveld himself. A great many belonged to protected species, and it was not clear how they had come into his possession. The collection also included thousands of eggshells, bones and insects preserved in formaldehyde.

Roeleveld wasn't upset when 40 police and firemen began to remove his collection. "They will return to me of their own accord," he said. "Let them take the animals. For each one they take, I will get a hundred back." An Associated Press report (17 April 1982) informs us that the police were investigating a number of possible charges including possession of unlicensed firearms, danger to the public health, unlicensed taxidermy and hunting of protected species. An Eerbeek municipal officer said the town council would consider building a special museum to house the collection if sufficient examples could be rescued from the ravages of mould and rot. The museum doesn't appear to have materialised, judging from a fruitless Google search.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

144. THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

The myth

The Battle of Britain was fought, on the home side, by pukka upper-class chaps with cut-glass accents and triple-barrelled names.

HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

Our image of the 1940 struggle between the Luftwaffe and the RAF, generally seen as Germany's first significant defeat in World War II, comes largely from feature films made in the immediate post-war period. The cinema depicted "The Few" as thoroughly posh, and the idea that they were all aerial aristocrats has survived ever since. It may come as a surprise, therefore, to learn that 70 per cent of RAF pilots were educated at state schools. In addition, one fifth of the pilots were foreigners, with the most successful squadrons made up of flyers from Poland and Czechoslovakia who already had combat experience, unlike the inevitably inexperienced and undertrained young Britons. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was full of scorn for what he saw as a failure of the upper classes to send their sons to the RAF (where, at the height of the battle, a pilot's life expectancy was just 87 flying hours). In private meetings, Churchill angrily denounced "the disappearance of the aristocracy from the stage", while paying tribute to "their replacement by these excellent sons of the lower middle classes".

Sources

The Fringes of Power – Downing Street Diaries 1939–55 by John Colville (Phoenix, 2005); *Spitfire* by Leo McKinstry (John Murray, 2007); http://s.coop/bbchistory; http://s.coop/independent.

Disclaimer

While not wishing to contradict the sainted Winston, it's only fair to point out that 30 per cent seems a pretty high proportion, compared to the proportion of public schoolboys in the population as a whole. And, of course, statistics are always debatable; you're welcome to dispute them on *FT*'s letters page.

Mythchaser

A reader wants to know the truth behind the story that William Wordsworth wrote "I wandered lonely as a cow", until his clever sister Dorothy persuaded him to change it to "cloud". Is that history, or poetic licence? Do tell.

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

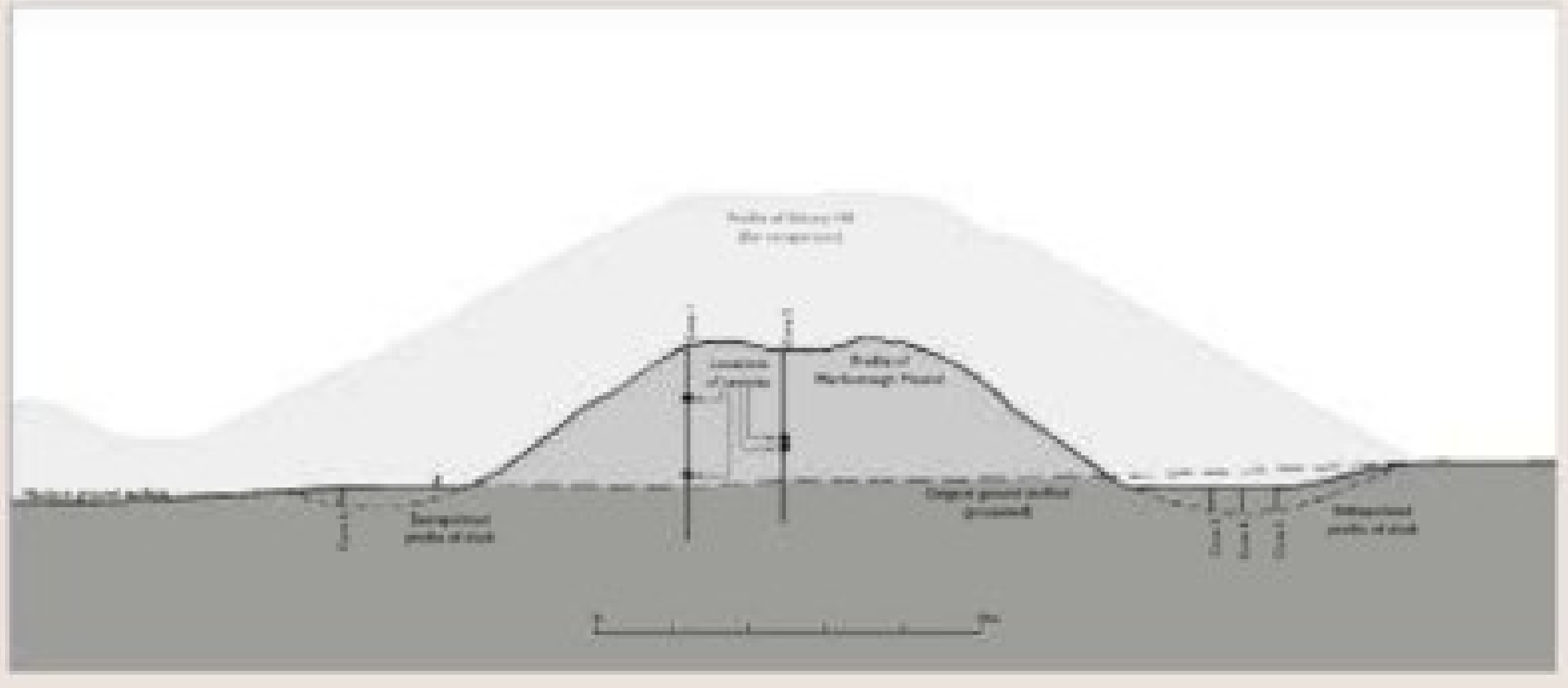
MERLIN STIRS...

COURTESY MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE

Within the strictly private grounds of Marlborough College and just visible from the A4 road that winds through the market town of Marlborough, Wiltshire, there is a 19m (62ft) tall artificial mound that has long been an enigma. For centuries, it has been popularly touted as the burial place of Merlin, the wizard of Arthurian legend, and one theory has it that the very name of Marlborough means "Merlin's barrow". The mound's known history is somewhat chequered. Almost 1,000 years ago, it was used as the motte for a Norman fort and later castle, it was the site of the general oath of allegiance to King John in 1209, it supported a royal hunting lodge, and in the 17th century a spiral ramp was cut into it to turn it into a decorative centrepiece for a formal garden. Subsequently, however, it was increasingly neglected, to the point that in more recent times it became the location for a water tank and a red brick chimney.

Some people had casually noted that it looked rather similar to the taller, Neolithic, Silbury Hill at Avebury, about 5 miles (8 km) to the west. Could it be the little sister of the great Avebury mound? Recent archæological investigation, carried out as part of a conservation programme being conducted by the Marlborough Mound Trust, shows that this is indeed the case. Two boreholes produced four samples of charcoal, allowing radiocarbon dating for the first time. This revealed that the mound was built around 2400 BC, so is about the same age as Silbury. Jim Leary (who led much of the recent archæological investigations for English Heritage at Silbury Hill) was involved in the Marlborough coring. "This is an astonishing discovery," he commented. "The Marlborough Mound has been one of the biggest mysteries in the Wessex landscape."

The importance of this new finding to British archæology cannot be overstated, extending, as it does, the orbit of the Avebury complex. Furthermore, Leary (along with Matthew Canti) has also been conducting the coring of a small mound immediately adjacent to the A4 road and only a few hundred yards from Silbury Hill. The feature has generally been regarded as an overgrown detritus heap resulting from early road construction, or possibly a Roman midden heap. But from analysis of the cores it seems the mound, known locally as "Silbaby" (**FT206:20**) or, more formally, "Waden Mound", is actually prehistoric, though further investigation is still required. Perhaps the spirit of Merlin is conjuring up a new phase of discovery within this enchanted piece of Wiltshire countryside, this already remarkably rich Neolithic landscape. *Marlborough College press release, BBC News Online, 31 May; Marlborough News Online, 10 June 2011. (Acknowledgements also to Steve Marshall and Pete Glastonbury.)*



COURTESY ENGLISH HERITAGE

WELL OF INIQUITY

What do you find at the bottom of a well other than water? In the case of one in Norwich, something pretty gruesome. In 2004, during archæological work at a site ahead of the construction of a shopping centre there, a mediæval well was uncovered. Crammed down it were the skeletons of 17 people, men, women and children. These remains were put into storage and only recently examined, using a combination of DNA analysis, carbon-dating and bone chemical studies. The forensic team was led by Professor Sue Black of the University of Dundee's Centre for Anthropology and Human Identification, who had been involved in identifying massacred Kosovan Albanians during the Balkans War. Seven skeletons from the well were examined (shown, right, in BBC 2 documentary), and it transpired that they were probably all from the same family and of Jewish ethnicity. It seems that the adults had been thrown headfirst down the well with the children afterwards. Norwich had a thriving mediæval Jewish community that was located in the same district as the well. It is known there was persecution of Jews in mediæval England, and so the obvious conclusion is that these unfortunates had been murdered. *BBC News Online, and BBC 2 documentary, "History Cold Case: The Bodies in a Well", 23 June 2011.*

COURTESY UN IVERSITY OF DUNDEE / BBC

STONE AGE TALISMANS

Recent archæological findings indicate that the Vikings coveted Stone Age objects, presumably for perceived magical qualities [see **FT271:18–19**]. Study of several Viking graves in southwest Norway has revealed much older Neolithic weapons, amulets and tools accompanying burials. Olle Hemdorff of the Archæological Museum in Stavanger said that he believes the items were buried to "protect and bring luck to the dead in the afterlife". This observation follows on from the discovery that Vikings who had travelled to Iceland were found to have been carrying Stone Age items with them. Initially, this was not considered significant by archæologists, but now, taken together with these recent findings and previously overlooked evidence from several locations in former Viking lands, a new light is being cast on them. This view is reinforced by the fact that Stone Age arrowheads and daggers were sometimes buried under Viking houses. Curiously, such interest in Stone Age relics is found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the throwing of pottery, round stones and shards into Ophelia's grave is described. *Yahoo News (India), 3 Feb 2011.*

SOLAR TEMPLE IN BULGARIA

On 15 December 2010, Bulgarian National Television reported the discovery of a solar temple, more than 8,000 years old, near the village of Ohoden, near Vratsa in northwest Bulgaria. The horseshoe-shaped temple was dug out from under tons of earth. Dozens of clay and stone discs were found in the vicinity. "The discs symbolise the disc of the Sun itself, which means that this is the earliest temple dedicated to the worship of the Sun God discovered on our lands," said archæologist Georgi Ganetsovski. It is a good three millennia older than Stonehenge. *Discovery Online, 16 Dec 2010.*

A VINTAGE FIND

The world's oldest winery has been discovered in the same Armenian cave where the world's oldest leather shoe was found last year [**FT269:20**]. There was a 6,000-year-old stone vat in which to press grapes, jars for fermentation and drinking bowls – at least 1,000 years older than any similar find. The team from the University of California, Los Angeles, found the remains of pressed grape skins as well as grape seeds, which were from a type of grape – *Vitis vinifera* – still used to make wine today. The winery was surrounded by ancient graves, leading experts to speculate that red wine was produced for ritualistic funeral ceremonies and as an offering to the dead. *D.Telegraph, Los Angeles Times, 12 Jan 2011.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

140. TOP THIS

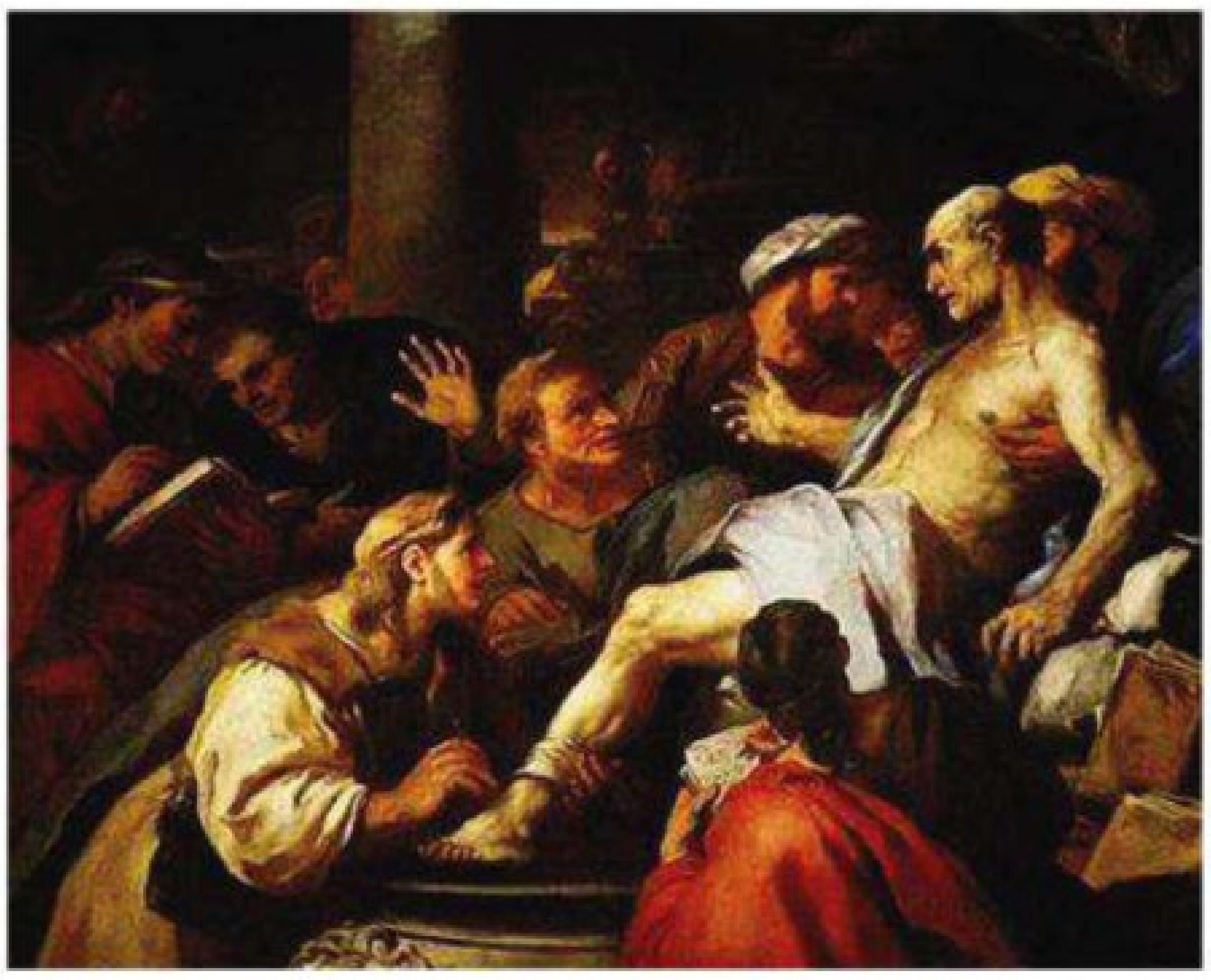
(Partly inspired by an essay on modern literary suicides posted by Alastair McCartney, 24 September 2009, at the ReadySteadyBook website. For other ancient self-toppings, see **FT154:21**. Otherwise, Yolande Grisé, *Le Suicide dans la Rome Antique* (Paris, 1982), and Miriam Griffin in *Greece & Rome* 38, 1986, pp64–77).

The propriety of doing yourself in was much debated in Greece and Rome. Some big names condemned it, e.g. Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, bk5 para1138a4f, and elsewhere) and Virgil (*Aeneid*, bk6 vv434–9). Others advocated or condoned, such as Plato (*Laws*, bk9 paras873C–D) and Seneca (*Letters*, no70). Ambivalences also attend. Socrates havers in the Platonic *Phædo* (para61C), the reading of which inspired one Cleombrotus to leap to his doom (Callimachus, *Greek Anthology*, bk7 no471) – trust this column will not thus affect any *FT* reader. Epicurus was said to have disapproved (Seneca, *The Happy Life*, ch19), yet Diogenes Lærtius (*Lives of the Philosophers*, bk10 ch15) says he eventually committed suicide, as did his most famous Roman follower, the poet Lucretius (the Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicle* for 54 BC), thereby giving Tennyson a lurid poem.

Suicide sometimes approached morbid cult status among eggheads. Ptolemy banned Hegesias's enthusiastic lectures on it, fearing population decline (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, bk1 ch83) – Auden's denial that poetry influences anything does not apply here. Roman jurist Ulpian (*Digest*, bk28 ch3 sect6 para7) deprecated the "self-glamorising suicides of certain philosophers".

Ulpian was thinking chiefly of Stoics, whose founder Zeno (Diogenes Lærtius, bk7 ch28) had suicided by holding his breath. Seneca's self-immolation (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk15 chs 61–4) was high on theatrics (right). Having severed his veins (along with wife Paulina, who was forcibly saved on Nero's orders; cf. Arthur and Cynthia Koestler), he chafed at the delay, vainly (after veinly) drank hemlock, then entered a sauna where he suffocated. His nephew, the poet Lucan, expired reciting verses on a dying soldier from his *Pharsalia* epic (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk15 ch72).

Stoics had no monopoly on this sort of thing. Some (Diogenes Lærtius, bk8 chs67–74 – various versions competed) said poet-scientist Empedocles (a proto-Darwin) jumped down Mt Etna to encourage belief in his divinity by vanishing – a theme for Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*. The Cynic Peregrinus (details in Lucian's pamphlet), whose variegated career included writing some now unidentifiable Christian texts, barbecued himself at the Olympic Games of AD 165 – this would enliven our modern dreary spectacles.



THE DEATH OF SENECA, LUCA GIORDANA, 1684

Romans fall monotonously on their swords in Shakespeare. Not that easy. Cato (Plutarch's biography, ch70 para6) had to complete the job by manually digging out his own entrails.

Other public finales include Sappho's jump from the Leucadian Rock (Greece's Lovers' Leap) through unrequited love, and the orator Demosthenes's (Plutarch's Life, chs29–30) special poisoned pen or venom concealed in his belt – prefiguring modern cyanide capsules.

Some went out quietly, self-starvation the favourite method: Atticus (literary friend of Cicero – Nepos's *Life*, chs21–2) and poet Silius Italicus (Pliny, *Letters*, bk 3 no7 para1), both suffering from incurable diseases; also historian Cremutius Cordus (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk4 ch35 para5).

Petronius (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk 16 ch19) tops the grand guignol parade, having his veins cut, sewn up, and re-cut during a sumptuous last supper, smashing a precious goblet coveted by Nero, and composing for that emperor a lubricious account of his debaucheries.

Though she was neither philosopher nor writer, I can't leave out Pontia, possibly Petronius's daughter, who after conviction for filicide opened her veins at a drunken party and danced herself to death – puts a new meaning to The Last Waltz.

"There are data of strange suicides that I shall pass over" – Fort, *Books*, p653, teasingly.

Something in the air

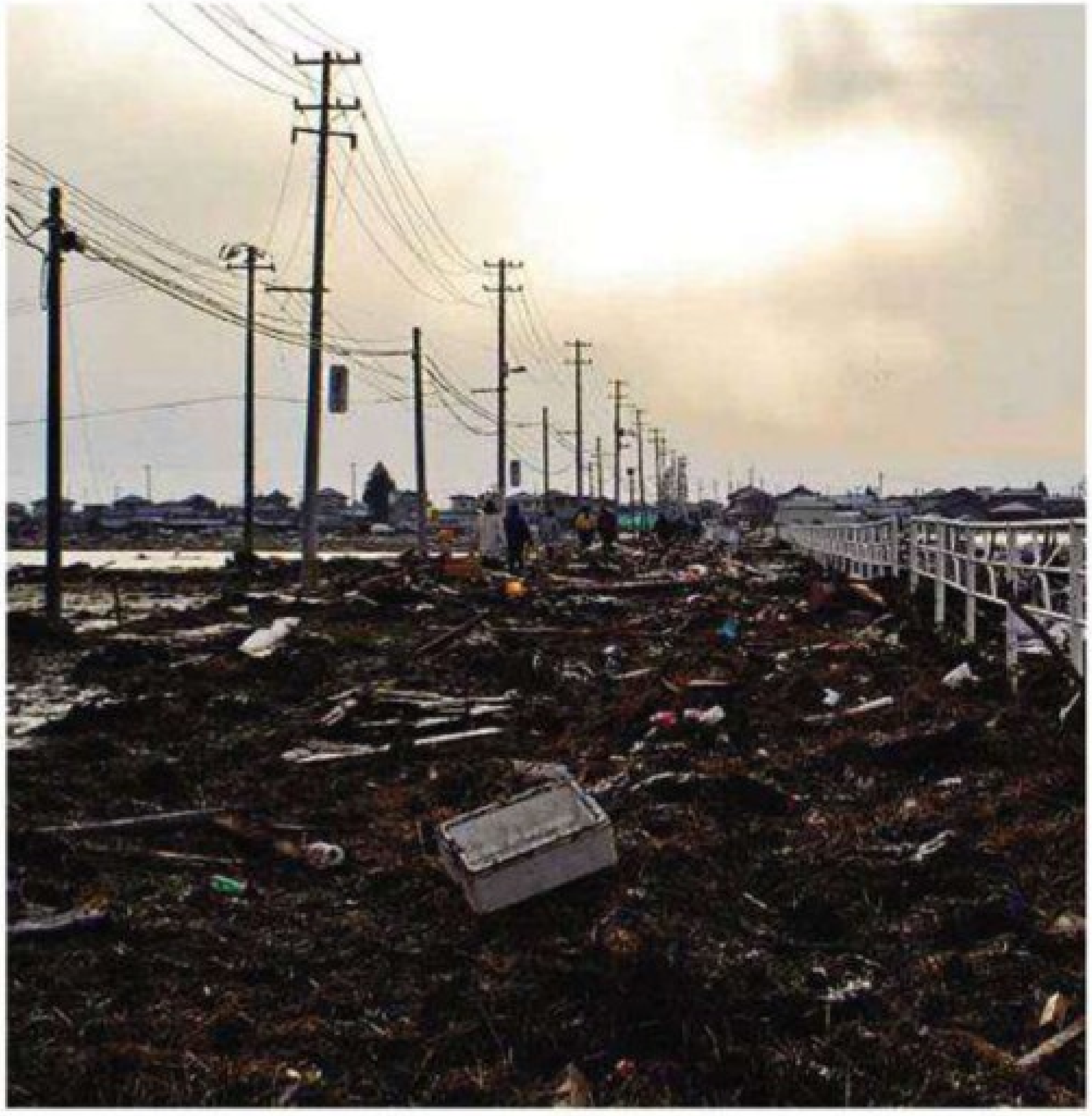
Linking the atmosphere to earthquakes and weather

QUAKE THEORY HEATS UP

The atmosphere above the epicentre of the Great Tohoku magnitude 9 earthquake in Japan on 11 March (right) underwent unusual changes in the days leading up to the disaster, according to preliminary data gathered by Dimitar Ouzounov, a professor of earth sciences at Chapman University in California, working at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. Looking to the sky in the hope of predicting earthquakes is not a new idea. The theory, known as the Lithosphere-Atmosphere-Ionosphere Coupling mechanism, posits that right before an earthquake, the stressed fault releases more gases, especially the colourless, odourless – but radioactive – radon. Once in the ionosphere, the radon strips air molecules of their electrons, splitting them into negatively charged particles (the free electrons) and positively charged particles (ions). These charged particles, called free radicals, attract condensed water in a process that releases heat, which can be detected in the form of infra-red radiation. It certainly makes sense that the lithosphere, atmosphere and ionosphere are linked in a way that can be measured when one of them is perturbed; it fits nicely with Fort's idea of Continuity. The question is to what extent the new evidence backs up this idea.

Using satellite data, Ouzounov and his colleagues found that the concentration of electrons in the ionosphere increased in the days before the Japanese earthquake, as did infra-red radiation. The peak was reached three days before the quake, on 8 March. The researchers have crunched data for more than 100 quakes in Asia and Taiwan, finding similar correlations for earthquakes with magnitudes bigger than 5.5 and depths less than 31 miles (50km).

However, successful earthquake forecasting is a long way off. No one has ever predicted an earthquake from atmospheric data, and plenty of supposed earthquake precursors, from weird animal behaviour to groundwater flowing the wrong way, have proved hit-or-miss [**FT140:24, 265:22**]. To iron out the usefulness of the atmospheric approach, according to Henry Pollack, an emeritus professor of geophysics at the University of Michigan, one would need to look at lots of earthquakes over time to make sure the phenomenon is statistically linked with fault ruptures. One would also need to discover how often these atmospheric anomalies show up *without* an associated quake. *LiveScience.com, Technology Review, 18 May; MX News (Sydney), 20 May 2011.*



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / JIJI PRESS

Gas released from faultlines could warm the air above

BIOPRECIPITATION

High-flying bacteria in the atmosphere may be a major cause of bad weather, as they have been found concentrated in the centre of hailstones. All precipitation – rain, hail, sleet or snow – begins with ice crystals forming around cloud particles. Dust grains and pollution droplets may both serve as nucleating particles, but bacteria are far more effective in this role.

In 2008, Brent Christner of Louisiana State University reported finding significant numbers of bacteria in snow found around the world; then in 2010, Alexander Michaud of Montana State University collected hailstones on the university campus following a major hailstorm. He found that while their outer layers had few bacteria, the cores contained high concentrations. These findings support the hypothesis of bioprecipitation – that living micro-organisms cause the rain to fall, having evolved to use the water cycle to facilitate their own dispersal.

"It's an interesting idea that's been thrown around for decades, but only recently has the data accumulated to support it," said Dr Christner at a meeting of the American Society for Microbiology.

Bacteria are known to gather in biofilms on plant surfaces and can form bacteria-rich aerosols in forest canopies that can rise on updrafts, eventually stimulating precipitation. One bacterium that has appeared in many contexts is *Pseudomonas syringæ*, which expresses a protein on its surface that encourages an orderly arrangement of water molecules. This in turn acts as a nucleation site, stimulating the formation of ice at temperatures far higher than those normally required. *P.syringæ* does this so effectively that it is used in a mixture for snow machines. The ice that it stimulates can damage the walls of plant cells, allowing it to feed on the cells' interiors. Only recently has it been realised that this strategy has a wider role.

Airborne bacteria can also spread diseases round the world. Despite being blown more than three miles (4.8km) high and exposed to solar radiation, strains of bacteria and fungi whipped up by desert storms in Africa survive and are able to grow when they return to Earth. Among 40 tests of air samples taken in the mid-Atlantic in 2006, 24 revealed living microbes, including 26 colonies of bacteria and 83 fungi. They included strains capable of causing disease in humans, animals and plants. A typical gramme of Sahara soil contains up to a billion bacteria, and estimates suggest two billion tons of soil particles are blown around the planet each year. Falls of fine Sahara sand occur periodically in many regions including the UK.

"Even if the UV kills 90 per cent of the microbes, dust higher up in the cloud will shade those lower down, so you still get a phenomenal number surviving," said Dale Griffin of the US Geological Survey. His team demonstrated that micro-organisms collected in the Atlantic were from specific regions in Africa. The microbes included *Gordonia terra*, which can cause skin disease in humans, *Massaria rosatii*, which infects sycamore trees, and *Alternaria dauci*, a cause of carrot blight. *Guardian, 25 May 2006; BBC News, 25 May 2011.*

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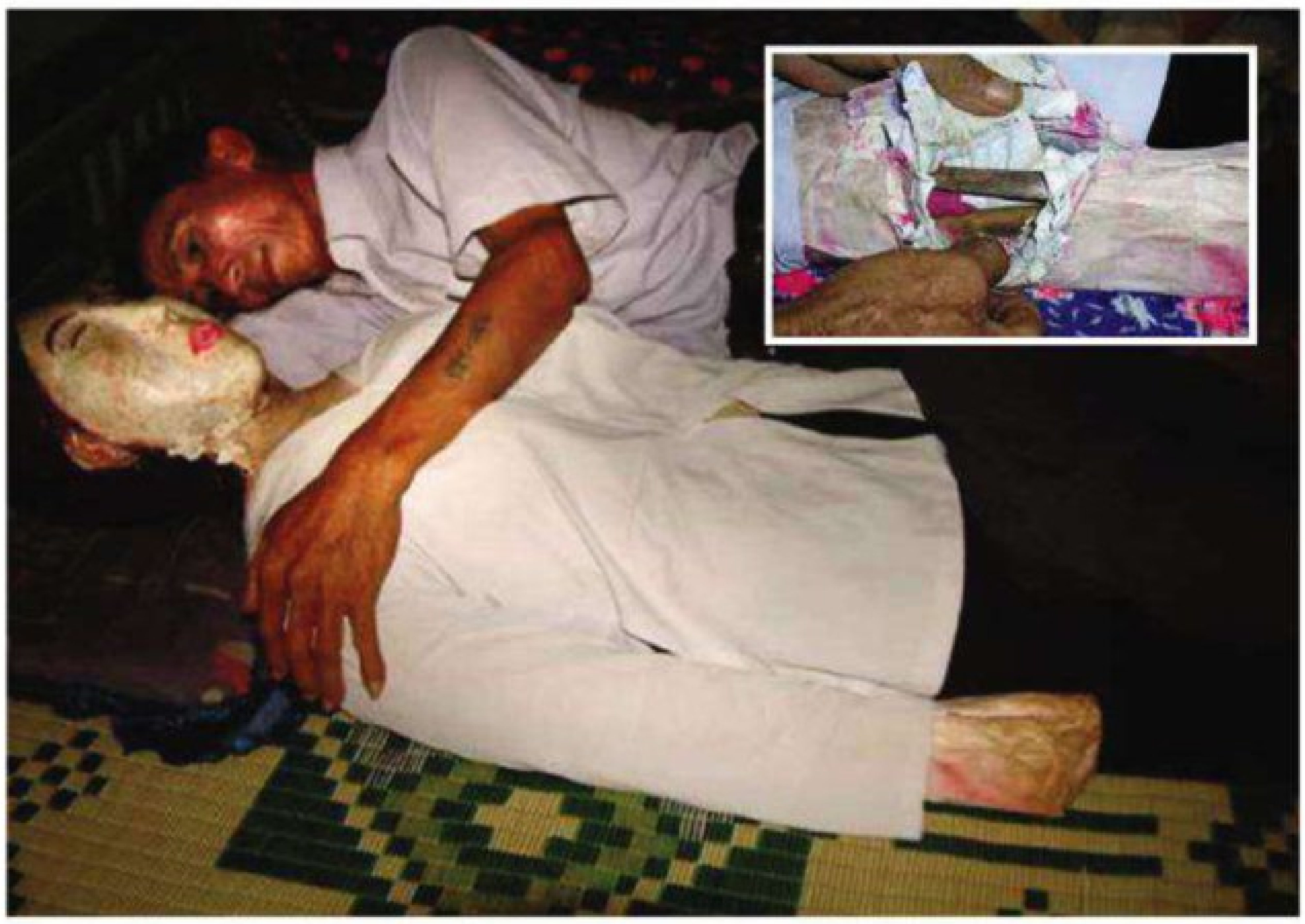
NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP

GRIEF IS A TERRIBLE THING, BUT HANGING ON TO A DEAD BODY DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT



VIETNAMNET BRIDGE / VU TRUNG

When his wife died in 2003, Le Van, 55, from Vietnam's Quang Nam province, began sleeping on top of her grave, but about 20 months later, freezing and lashed by rain, he decided to dig a tunnel into the grave "to sleep with her" – but his children got wind of his plan and prevented him going to the grave. So, one night in November 2004, he dug up his wife, moulded clay around her remains (inset) to give her the figure of a woman, put clothes on her and placed her in his bed to hug at night (right). He slept beside her for five years before being discovered. The father of seven said neighbours didn't dare visit the house. "I'm a person who does things differently," he said. "I'm not like normal people." *[R] 27 Nov 2009.*

Jean Stevens, 91, lived by herself in a tumbledown house in Wyalusing, Pennsylvania. But she wasn't alone, not really, not as long as she could visit her husband and twin sister. No matter they were already dead. She simply had their embalmed corpses dug up a few days after they were buried, tending to the remains until police were tipped off in April 2010. James Stevens, her husband of nearly 60 years, had died in 1999, and her twin sister June in October 2009. She kept June's body, dressed in her "best housecoat", on an old couch in a spare room and sprayed her with expensive perfume. "I'd go in, and I'd talk, and I'd forget," she said. "I put glasses on her. When I put the glasses on, it made all the difference in the world. I would fix her up. I'd fix her face up all the time." She kept her husband on a couch in the detached garage for over a decade, dressed in a dark suit, white shirt and blue tie. "Death is very hard for me to take," she said. *[AP] 6 June 2010.*

On 7 November 2008, acting on a tip-off from a social worker, Chicago police searched the house of Margaret Bernsdorff in the wealthy suburb of Evanston. They found the decaying remains of three of her siblings in different rooms. Elaine Bernsdorff died in her 60s in the early 1980s, while the eldest sister, Anita, died in May 2008, aged 98. A brother, Frank, died in 2003, aged 83. All three died of natural causes. Neighbours described Margaret Bernstorff as alert, aware, and well liked. She enjoyed gardening and shared her plants. She was known to be a hoarder, but no one imaged that, along with furniture and the stacks of old newspapers, she was storing her siblings. The Bernsdorff family had lived in the house since at least the 1960s, when Margaret's father, Frank, was an assistant professor of German studies at Northwestern University. He died in 1966 and his wife Lilian in 1974. *[AP+AFP] 8 Nov 2008.*

Early in 2010, a 73-year-old woman died of natural causes in Ekaterinburg, the biggest city in the Urals. Instead of reporting the death, her 69-year-old sister preserved the body by wrapping it in petrol-soaked cloths. After about a year, on 26 January 2011, she tried to "jump start" the mummified corpse with wires connecting the body's hand and neck to the mains. However, instead of reanimation, the Frankenstein experiment set the body on fire and severely damaged the apartment block where she lived. The surviving sister was hospitalised suffering from burns and smoke inhalation. *TV-Novosti, 26 Jan; Sun, 4 Feb 2011.*

Animal welfare officers searched a house in Sebastian, Florida, on 21 March 2009 after neighbours complained of a foul smell thought to be from feral cats. They removed eight cats and notified police about "possible human remains" in the rubbish-strewn house. Police arrested the occupant, Penelope Sharon Jordan, 61, after finding the mummified remains of her 96-year-old mother Timmie in bed, dressed in a nightgown with her skin fused to the mattress. A post mortem exam showed she had died of natural causes. Her daughter admitted cashing her social security cheques for at least six years, and was charged with fraud and grand theft. She said she hadn't reported the death because she couldn't afford burial expenses. *[AP] 24 Mar 2009.*

After a tip-off to police from his ex-wife in January this year, a 55-year-old Japanese man admitted keeping the body of his father, Mitsuo Sonoda, in a wardrobe in the Kyoto apartment they shared. "More than five years ago," he said, "during the winter, I came home and found my father in bed. He wasn't moving. I left him there for a week, but he started to smell, so I put him in the wardrobe." *news.co.au, 7 Jan 2011.*

When Olive Maddock, 95, died of natural causes, her daughter Hazel and granddaughter Jasmine didn't organise a funeral. Although they shared the same house in Wallasey, Merseyside, they claimed not to have noticed the widow had died, as she often shut herself in her room and kept herself to herself for weeks at a time. Hazel Maddock, 61, a television extra in programmes such as *Brookside* and *Hollyoaks*, continued cashing her mother's state pension until a suspicious friend called police, who discovered the body on 2 August 2010.

Hating doctors, the old lady had barricaded herself in her room, so police had to break down the door. A pathologist estimated she had been dead from between two and six months. The whole house stank and was infested with rats and mice. Jasmine Maddock, 35, an artist, describes herself as a surrealist and has exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery. A close friend of hers said: "Olive Maddock refused to wash in years and the house had no working toilet. Jasmine was beaten and forced to clean up the mess by her grandmother – she was a slave to her. The house smelt so bad that Jasmine and her mother didn't notice it get any worse when Olive died. They used to pass food into her room." *D.Mail, 8 Jan, 14 June; BBC News, 13 June 2011.*

Horror film-maker Timothy Fattig, 34, was arrested in March after the decomposed body of his mother Jill, 68, was found in the house they shared in Tombstone, Arizona, a year after her death. An officer had visited the house to do a welfare check and found the woman's skeletal remains. Her son said that when he found her body, he was too overcome with grief to report her death. For several months, he told neighbours that she was in hospital. Mr Fattig, who wrote a biography of the famous lawman Wyatt Earp, was arrested on suspicion of negligent homicide. The website of Desert Scream Productions, for whom he worked, says the company is "here to share our love of blood and guts and old-school American horror with the fans". *Arizona Daily Star, 10 Mar; D.Mail, 14 Mar 2011.*

In April, 48-year-old twins Edwin Larry Berndt and Edward Christian Berndt were charged with the murder of their mother Sybil, 89, whose body lay rotting for three months in the hallway of their house in Houston, Texas. They were arrested when police went to check on the old lady, prompted by a neighbour who called to say she had not been seen since January. The house was in "deplorable condition and smelled terrible". Mrs Berndt was found lying face down on the floor, dressed in a nightgown pulled up under her arms and was not wearing underwear. Her body was in an advanced state of decomposition and was infested with insects.

Edwin Berndt said he and his brother were watching a championship football game on television on 10 January when their mother "came in ranting and raving and then fell down and did not get up". He said they decided to leave her on the floor because they didn't have money to provide her with medical treatment. (However, police found bank statements totalling about $700,000.) For the first day, Mrs Berndt was conscious and able to speak, but didn't ask for any help. Her sons didn't give her any food or water and after three days, on 13 January, she died. Edwin said he remembered the date because it was a day after her 89th birthday. The twins said they didn't call police because they didn't want to go to jail. *Irish Times, 13 April 2011.*

For other corpse-keepers, see **FT50:56–62, 135:25, 138:20, 158:17, 164:20–21, 181:22, 191:15, 223:19, 225:21.**

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
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Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

THE BODY OF A 58-YEAR-OLD TAXI DRIVER, surnamed Kim, was found in an abandoned stone quarry near Mungyeong, 115 miles (185km) southeast of Seoul in South Korea, on 1 May, a week after Easter. His hands and feet were nailed to a wooden cross, on his head was a crown of thorns, there was a wound on the right side of his torso, and he was wearing nothing but his underpants. Nylon strings were tied around his neck, arms and stomach, and there were whip marks on his skin. After carrying out a re-enactment, police believe he killed himself without assistance by nailing his feet to the cross, tying his neck to it and stabbing himself in the side. He is then thought to have drilled holes in his hands and slipped them over nails on the cross, which were hammered into the wood from the rear, leaving the sharp ends exposed. There were two smaller crosses erected on each side of the cross he was nailed to, as well as a propped-up mirror so the man could witness his own suffering. Not far away was a tent containing an electric drill, hammer, nails, pieces of wood and instructions for self-crucifixion in the man's handwriting. An SUV belonging to the man was parked nearby. An autopsy showed he had died of bleeding from the stab wound and suffocation. Acquaintances described him as a religious fanatic obsessed with out-of-body experiences, so perhaps he was hoping for resurrection. *Joongang Daily (Seoul), Times, 5 May; Dublin Metro, 6 May; D.Mail, 19 May 2011.*

TERRY COLON

IVAN TODOROV, A 35-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN computer programmer who had been dumped by his girlfriend, died after persuading a friend to bury him alive overnight, hoping it would bring him "good luck". He dug a hole in a garden in the far eastern city of Blagoveshchensk and climbed into an improvised coffin, with holes for air pipes, taking with him a mobile phone, a blanket and a bottle of water. His friend covered the coffin with planks and 8in (20cm) of earth and then left, after Todorov phoned to say he was fine. However, sludge from heavy overnight rain clogged the air tubes and the next morning his friend returned to find him dead.

Numerous Russian bloggers had written of undergoing supervised self-burial. State newspaper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* had even run a feature on the practice. In the summer of 2010, a man in the Vologda region of north-western Russia persuaded a friend to bury him in a forest to help him overcome his fear of death. He was found dead an hour and a half later, crushed by the weight of earth. *BBC News, D.Telegraph, 2 June; Sun, 3 June 2011.*

A 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL in central Russia was so scared by Harold Camping's prediction that the world would end on 21 May [FT269:11, 274:55, 277:26–27] that she hanged herself. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 27 May 2011.*

RETIRED TEACHER ANN NEWTON, 58, drowned in her shallow pond in Penshaw, near Sunderland, on 3 February, after being pinned underwater by a garden ornament. She was filling a bird feeder when she slipped on wet grass. As she fell, her blouse snagged the carved tree trunk, which toppled and trapped her face-down under the 18in (46cm)-deep water. Her devastated partner, Norman Lunn, found her after returning from a walk. *Sunderland Echo, 12 May; Sun, 13 May 2011.*

A MAN DROWNED ON 11 MARCH AFTER FALLING from a flimsy stepladder and landing head-first in a water butt at his home in Fleet in Lincolnshire. Retired printer Arthur Sexton, 80, was found with his legs poking out of the 4ft (1.2m)-deep butt by neighbour Ian Bond after his wife raised the alarm. He was wedged in so tight he was unable to pull himself free. "I had to shake him out he was in so tight," said Mr Bond. *D.Mail, Metro, D.Mirror, 21 April 2011.*

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FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

POLY STYRENE'S DAY-GLO UFO

GETTY IMAGES / REDFERNS / GUS STEWART

The annals of rock'n'roll are peppered with performers who claim to have seen UFOs or in some cases to have been abducted by them. Mostly, this is just harmless posturing, easy publicity stunting or the hyping up of some ambiguous incident. But for Poly Styrene, X-Ray Spex's punk princess (right), who sadly died of cancer in May this year, her close encounter was the harbinger of a complete life change. "The moment that changed me for ever… was seeing a Day-Glo UFO in Doncaster one night after a concert. It was a bright ball of luminous pink, made of energy – like a fireball. Everyone else thought I'd lost the plot." None of the rest of the band saw the UFO, nor was it reported in the local media, but the experience was so real to the singer that during it she felt electricity vibrating through her body. The encounter was life-changing and she was really never the same again. The band folded shortly afterwards and Poly Styrene was first diagnosed with schizophrenia, later being re-diagnosed as having bipolar disorder. At the same time, she became spiritually inclined and eventually found peace in the Hari Krishna movement. It seems unlikely that the singer saw a physical, objective craft of any kind and it could be argued that she had a pre-existing mental health condition which she retro-engineered as being connected to the UFO sighting. Or it could equally be that she had an entirely personal experience that in other cultures and contexts would have been interpreted as a religious vision of some kind. What really mattered was what she as the witness felt about the experience. It would have been easy for her to ride the bandwagon of publicity offered by the UFO, to have recorded songs or an album about it, but she didn't. She accepted the experience and its consequences as unique to her and went on to live her life quietly, immersing herself, as so many other UFO experiencers have, in esoteric belief systems, trying to make sense of what it means to be human here on planet Earth. *Independent, 27 April 2011*.

HE WAS ONLY JOKING, FOLKS!

Those promoting 'disclosure' of UFO secrets often place great significance on ET-related utterances made by world leaders. The former US President Ronald Reagan was well-known for having what one of his aides called an obsession with "little green men", including a story about his own sighting from a plane in 1974. At the height of the Cold War, he even startled his aides when, at a meeting with Soviet president Gorbachev, he suggested the two super-powers would cooperate if Earth was invaded by aliens (see **FT187:24**). Another persistent rumour was that after a special screening of *ET* at the White House in 1982, Reagan turned to film-maker Steven Spielberg and "started talking about how close to reality it was" before being quickly ushered out of the room. Was Reagan about to spill the beans or was he simply having some fun? A recent revelation by Steven Spielberg, interviewed by the Ain't It Cool film news website in June, suggests that Reagan's sense of humour was more nuanced than many suspected. According to Spielberg, after the screening Reagan stood up and looking around at the guests, that included astronauts and judges, said: "I want to thank you for bringing *ET* to the White House, we really enjoyed your movie." Then, completely deadpan, he added: "And there are a number of people in this room who know that everything on that screen is absolutely true." But rather than being quickly ushered out, the whole room erupted into laughter. The guests recognised this *was* a joke and this was confirmed when the President pulled Spielberg aside for a private chat. He recalls: "I don't think he let something slip there, no… because I'm a bit of a ufologist I was hoping there was something more to the joke than met my eye [but] I'm sorry to say I think he was simply trying to tell a joke." But why let the facts get in the way of a good story? Ain't It Cool news 6 June 2011: http://www.aintitcool.com/node/49921.

LOST IN THE LAND OF OZ

The idea that UFO files have gone missing because governments are desperate to conceal evidence of alien contact has re-emerged as a *cause célèbre* for conspiracy theorists. The controversy was stoked earlier this year when it emerged the British government had routinely shredded intelligence files on UFOs, including one that covered the Rendlesham incident, as recently as 1990. The official explanation for destruction was simple, but unlikely to convince those looking for evidence of a cover-up. Before the arrival of electronic storage, papers files were bulky, storage space was short and, as most UFO reports were found to be "of no defence significance", why keep them? This was British policy until very recently and it appears other governments have adopted a similar attitude. In June, a FOI request by the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed the Department of Defence had, as recently as 2004, destroyed files covering sighting reports covering an eight-year period from 1974. Veteran Aussie ufologist Bill Chalker said the reason given for destruction appeared to be "little more than house cleaning". As in the British case, officials simply did not recognise the records as having any historic interest, despite the huge and undiminished public appetite for information on UFOs. We also suspect that, since the arrival of Freedom of Information legislation, destruction remains the most straightforward method of avoiding contact with 'persistent correspondents', as most ufologists are categorised by authorities. Fortunately, in the Australian case, digital copies of most of the "missing" files are in fact available via the Australian National Archives in Canberra and can be purchased by anyone with Internet access. Unsurprisingly, the "missing" files contain no smoking gun. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June; *Daily Telegraph* (London), 18 June 2011; Bill Chalker's Oz Files: http://bit.ly/kZytHm (theozfiles.blogspot.com).

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES SHARES AN INTRIGUING RECENT SIGHTING INVOLVING A MYSTERY SHIP AND A JINXED SUBMARINE.

UFOS OFF THE STARBOARD BOW

An interesting report arrived at *FT* recently, just hours after the UFO encounter that it described had taken place. It was to prove both intriguing and frustrating.

The setting for this sighting was quite unusual – the decks of a commercial vessel sailing open waters off the west coast of Scotland. But even reporting this news exposed a growing issue faced by the modern ufologist. It was feared by the witnesses that citing details of the location could reveal the identity of the vessel in question.

Sadly, where UFOs are concerned, witness confidentiality has to be given priority whenever requested – indeed, it was the basis for the voluntary creation of the first 'Code of Practice' agreed by UK researchers three decades ago. It seems that the more credibility someone feels they have to lose over filing a UFO report, the less likely they are to describe what they see; or, should they do so, to sanction public disclosure of the details. In these days of instant access to information online, these problems are heavily compounded, because innocently reported clues could help someone expose information that might have unwanted implications. Even the Code of Practice did not foresee the age of a global electronic super library where data can be worked upon (or Pentagon files hacked into) without even leaving your own house.

With these caveats in mind, and with due thanks to the ship's officer who reported to us, here is what happened.

On the evening of 22 October 2010, the ship was some miles out from the Scottish coast when at 7.45pm two of the crew (an engineer and a supervising officer) spotted an object ahead. It was over the water, glowing bright but moving in an extraordinary manner – diagonally to them and at speed. The engineer, trying to rationalise it as some form of aircraft assessed that it was moving "at the speed of the fastest aeroplane but with even better manœuvrability than a helicopter". This observer went off deck to find other witnesses (including the ship's chief engineer). The object was still present on his return, but unfortunately had gone before the chief could arrive up top. All told, the UFO was present for about 10 minutes before vanishing.

I began some enquiries to try to figure out what might have been seen, but it was difficult without being able to reveal even the location of those involved.

The planet Jupiter was bright and located in roughly the same part of the sky as the object that night and so had to be considered as a possible explanation. I could only suggest that witnesses look at the same area of sky on the next clear night and compare Jupiter to what they saw. But their frequent time at sea made contact difficult. The fast motions reported could be autokinesis, where eye muscles move and make it appear as if a bright light source is itself travelling. But the calibre of the witnesses and their insistence on what they saw has to be set alongside that theory.

However, there was another fascinating complication. Royal Navy submarine *HMS Astute* (below) had run aground on shingle banks that very morning and became stranded for many hours, attracting worldwide attention. The sub had secret stealth technology aboard which was under sea trial, and there was much concern that, as tides changed and left the boat high and dry, aspects of this hi-tech wizardry could be exposed to any prying eyes. Unfortunately, the *Astute* was not in a protected zone but close to the coast and in sight of thousands of spectators and film crews. Locals ignored the secrecy concerns and even organised sightseeing trips around the grounded boat as the powers that be were forced to wait for high tide and any chance of pulling the *Astute* free. This tide actually came minutes before the UFO sighting reported above and the sub was freed shortly before then.

HMS Astute was built in 2007 but has already acquired quite a reputation for being jinxed. It has been beset with massive cost overruns and technical problems, had a serious collision with a tug during the rescue reported above, and in April 2011, during a visit to Southampton, was the scene of a tragedy when a crewman shot two others aboard the sub (one fatally).

On 22 October, *Astute* had been stranded in waters off the west coast of Scotland and, while not in proximity to where the commercial ship was sailing at the time of its UFO encounter, was in the same coastal waters that evening. Any surveillance craft – either from our own military or from some foreign power – would have had good reason to be crossing this part of the ocean heading for the location of the stricken sub. This might be another explanation for what was seen from the ship, but remains impossible to confirm as such operations are not publicly revealed; again, the inability to be specific about the witnesses gets in the way.

The Navy was forced to wait for high tide to free the sub

Yet we have not exhausted the intrigue surrounding this case, because 22 October 2010 proves to have been chock-full of high-profile UFO sightings. That same evening in Cincinnati, Ohio, there was a mass sighting with multiple video films from independent witnesses revealing spiralling orange lights drifting through the air. However, indications are that this was a troupe of skydiving parachutists during a performance.

Elsewhere in the USA, several photographs were taken over the mountains at Dillard, Georgia, showing a white comet-shaped object – filmed in local daylight about the same time as, thousands of miles away, the *Astute* rescue and the shipboard UFO sighting were both underway.

Probably, the most discussed case from that day is film footage from a passenger aboard a commercial flight from Lima to Machu Picchu and passing over Cusco in Peru. Again, this daytime sighting was at a similar time to the events unfolding in darkness in Scotland. The images show a series of bright flashes in low cloud covering a valley below the high-flying plane. Then what appears to be a disc-shaped object, flashing in the sunlight, briefly emerges from cloud below the jet and re-enters the mists. I do wonder whether this might be an optical mirage or distortion caused by the plane window through which the footage is being shot, but amongst the UFO fraternity the footage is well regarded. Certainly, having both seaboard and airboard sightings on the same day – though an ocean apart – is unusual.

And there were several other UK sightings that evening, including three golden lights above the A5 in Staffordshire two hours after the Scottish ship encounter and, in Northumbria, a single orange orb moving south to east just five minutes after the object in Scottish waters had disappeared.

I hope more progress can be made on the Scottish case, but in the meantime it led me to investigate my records to find the most dramatic UFO sightings made aboard a ship. Next month, I'll let you know what I found...

BAE SYSTEMS

The Ghosts of Versailles

An Adventure in Time

2011 sees the 100th anniversary of the publication of one of the most extraordinary and controversial 'ghost stories' of our time. **TOM HEYWOOD** looks at the characters and events surrounding the celebrated Versailles 'time slip' and the debate it has provoked ever since.

FACING PAGE: MARIE ANTIONETTE WITH HER TWO ELDEST CHILDREN IN THE PETIT TRIANON'S GARDENS , BY ADOLF ULRICH WERTMÜLLER / IMAGE PROCESSING BY ETIENNE GILFILLAN

This is the story of how two respectable English ladies went for a walk in the gardens of Versailles on a hot summer's day in 1901 and left convinced they had gone back in time and come face to face with Marie Antoinette. It's a story which caused a sensation when published as *An Adventure* in 1911, with its compelling account of an eerie atmosphere, displaced characters from another age, anachronistic landscaping, and ghostly buildings from an earlier time.

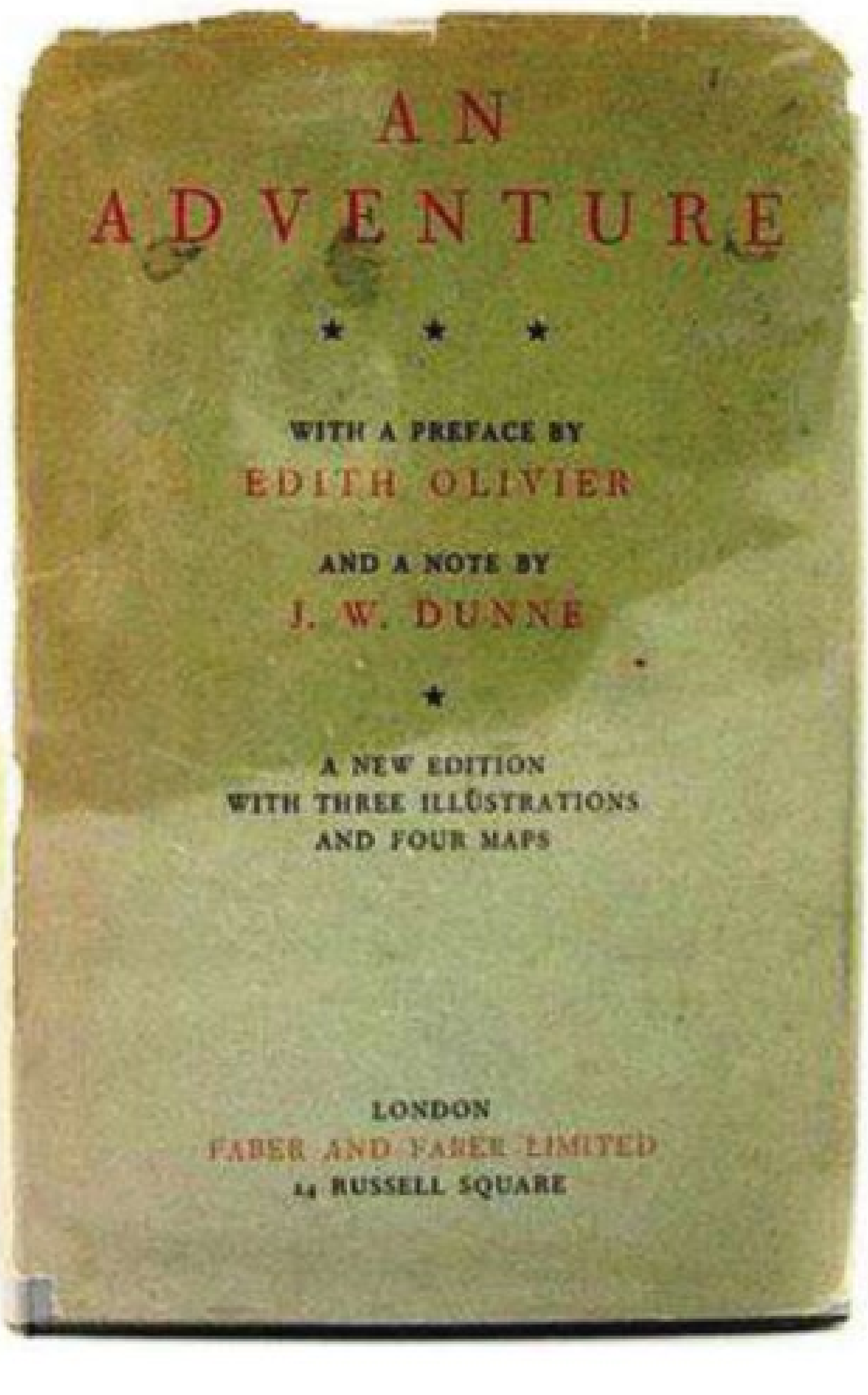
But what did these women really experience? What actually happened that day? And what might explain it?

THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURE(S)

Although the 1911 book's authors' surnames were given as 'Morison' and 'Lamont', these were in fact pseudonyms. It was not until the book's fourth edition in 1931 that the real authors' names were revealed as Miss CAE Moberly and Miss EF Jourdain respectively. They had chosen to keep their true identities hidden due to their employment at St Hugh's, an Oxford College then only admitting women, where they were respectively Principal and Vice Principal. It's worth noting that the two only met in 1901, when Moberly asked Jourdain to become her Vice Principal, and were probably relative strangers when Jourdain asked Moberly to accompany her on a trip to Paris that summer.

Charlotte Ann Elizabeth Moberly (1846–1937) was the daughter of the Headmaster and Bishop of Winchester and was appointed the first Principal of St Hugh's in 1886. In those days, it was called St Hugh's Hall, only later becoming a 'college'. Indeed, Moberly ('Annie' as she was known) was not an academic, her appointment to the role being made on the basis of her character and social background. As for Eleanor Frances Jourdain (1863–1924), she did have an academic education, reading Modern History at Oxford. She had set up her own school, which had a finishing school of sorts in Paris, for which she retained a flat. It was to this Paris flat that she invited Annie after the latter had offered her the job of being her deputy.

Two English ladies in Versailles were convinced they had gone back in time



AN
ADVENTURE

* * *

WITH A PREFACE BY
EDITH OLIVIER

AND A NOTE BY
J. W. DUNNE

*

A NEW EDITION
WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND FOUR MAPS

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People with some knowledge of the story often make the assumption that the two women made just one visit to Versailles; in fact, there were a number of visits over time before the book summarising their experiences was published. Let's start with what researchers regard as the first and most critical visit.

On 10 August 1901, the two ladies left Paris by train, bound for Versailles. The Palace and its gardens had been built and developed under the patronage of Louis XIV in the second half of the 17th century. Louis XVI had had the gardens replanted in the late 18th century and it is with his reign, his wife Marie-Antoinette, and the Revolution of 1789 that Versailles is most popularly associated. In 1833, the place was decreed a museum

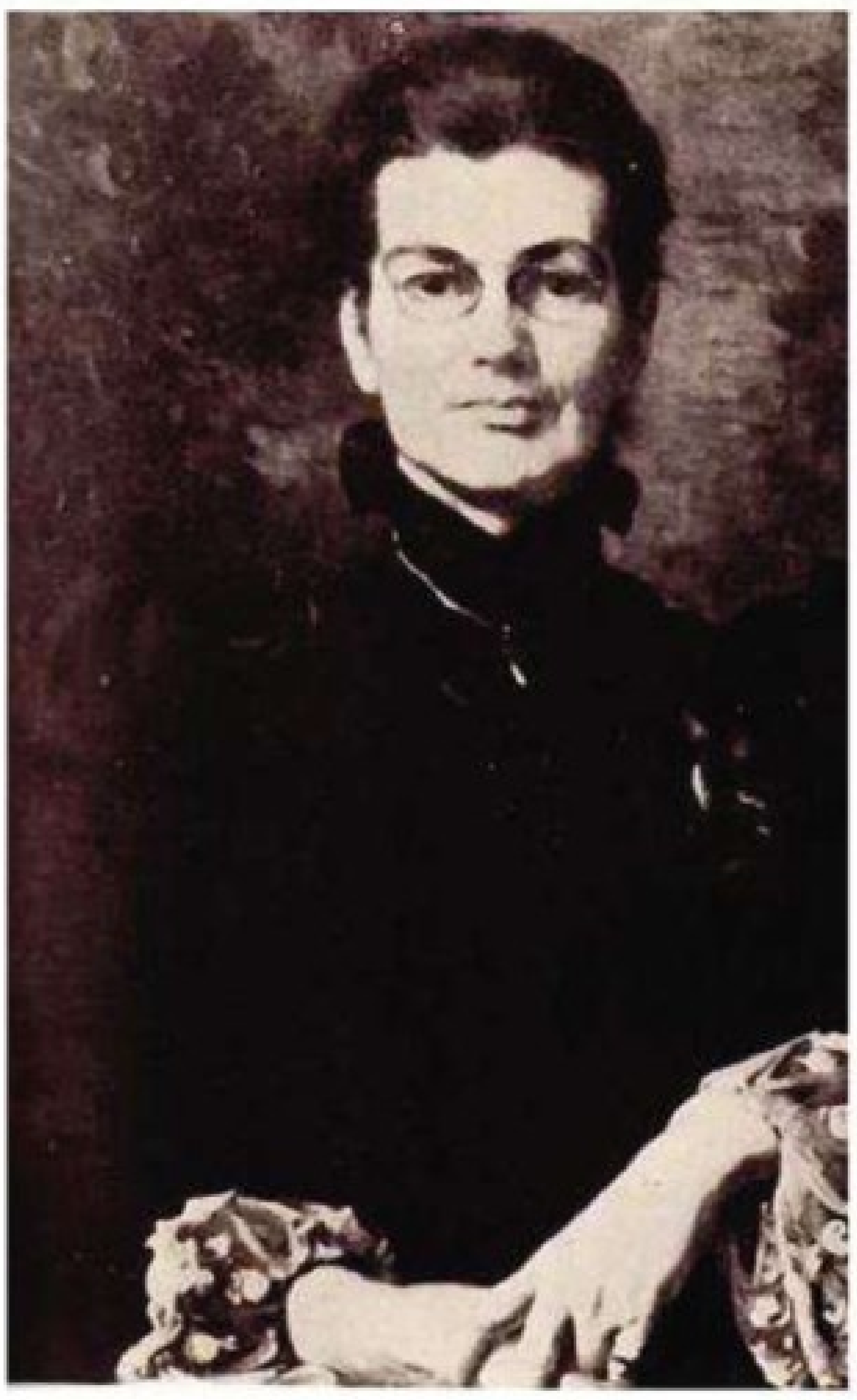
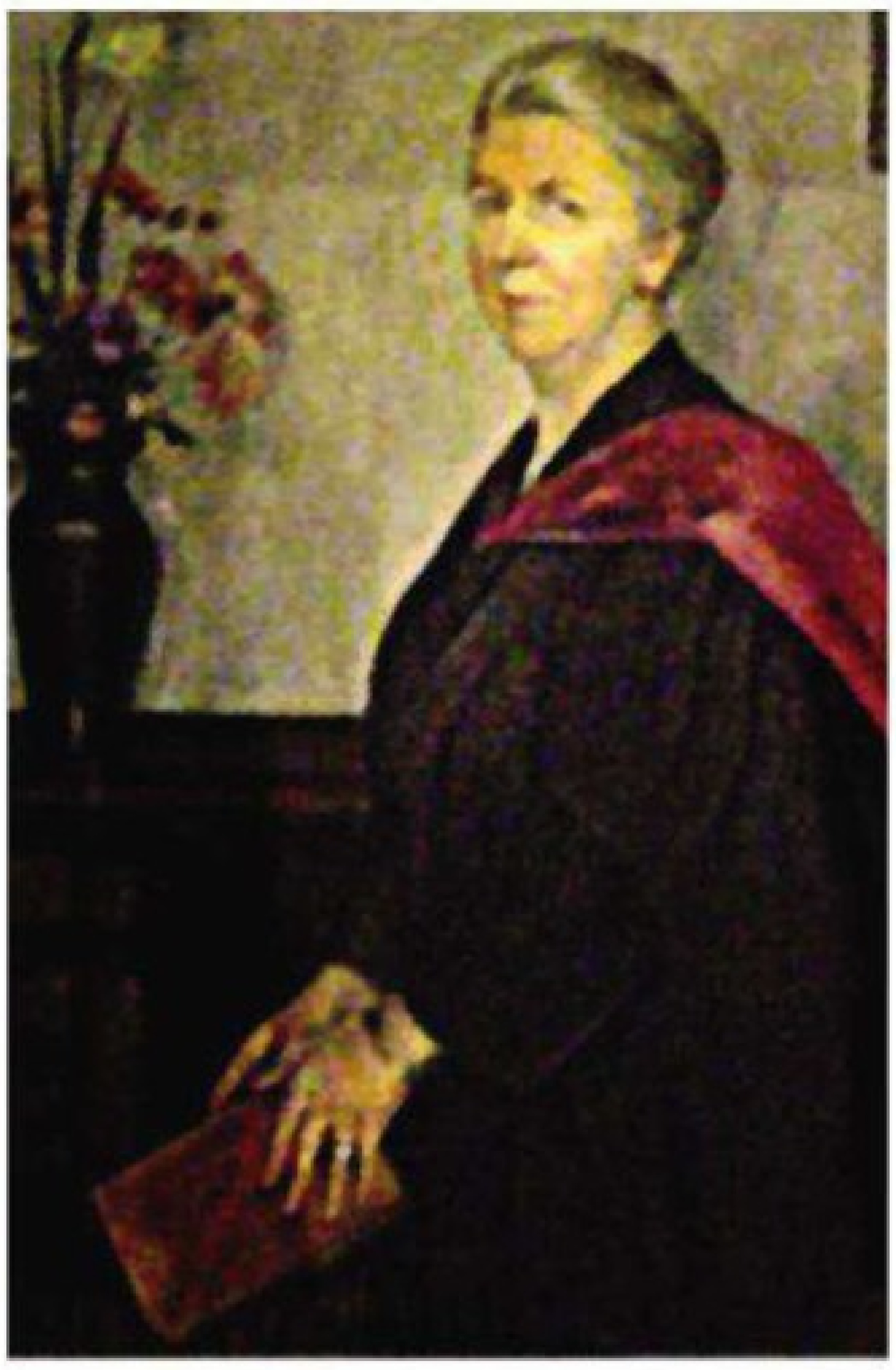
dedicated to "all the glories of France" and by 1901, when the two ladies visited, preservation and restoration would have been under way.

The day was hot and somewhat overcast. The ladies first visited the Palace, resting at the Salon des Glaces before deciding to head for the 'Petit Trianon', the house in its own gardens which Louis XVI had given Marie Antoinette in 1774. The two had a Baedeker guide to Versailles, and consulted this as they began the mile or so stroll to the Petit Trianon. As they walked, the two "began talking about our mutual acquaintances in England and paid but little attention to our surroundings". And this is where things started to get very odd. Perhaps because they were deep in conversation, the women soon became lost after missing a turning for the Petit Trianon. They entered a lane, where Moberly noticed a woman shaking a white cloth from a window and Jourdain saw a deserted farmhouse, outside of which was an old-fashioned plough. At this point, they said, a feeling of oppression and dreariness came over them. They then encountered two men in greenish-grey official dress and wearing tri-cornered hats, whom they took to be gardeners and of whom they asked directions. Their feelings of gathering dread seem to have continued as they passed a "kiosk" they later thought must be the Temple de l'Amour, where they came across a man whose face was "repulsive, its expression odious".

Annie Moberly later wrote: "Everything suddenly looked unnatural, therefore unpleasant; even the trees seemed to become flat and lifeless, like wood worked in tapestry. There were no effects of light and shade, and no wind stirred the trees".

Another man appeared, running towards them and giving them directions that finally led them to the Petit Trianon. And then, in one of the most famous scenes of the story, Moberly saw a middle-aged woman sitting reading or sketching on the lawn by the house, wearing a summer dress. Jourdain, it seems, did not recall her at all. This is the woman they later decided could well have been Marie Antoinette herself, an identification which helped elevate the account above any common or, as it were, garden ghost story, and which would ensure its enduring appeal. Finally, inside the Petit Trianon they tagged along with a French-speaking guided tour before leaving the gardens and returning to the town of Versailles for tea.

Interestingly (critically, in some researchers' opinions), although Moberly in a letter to her sister soon afterwards recounted her feelings of "unnatural depression", none of the other, stranger elements were noted at this time. The two ladies appear briefly to have discussed whether the Petit Trianon was haunted, but that seems to have been the limit of their conversation about it for several months. The important point to note here is that the details later recorded concerning their experiences do *not* appear to have been discussed immediately after the visit itself, when memory was freshest. In fact, the whole thing began to gain momentum when the women were back in Oxford that November. Annie Moberly mentioned the lady she had seen in the summer dress, and Eleanor Jourdain replied that she had not seen anyone. Here seems to have been the catalyst for their exploration of what had happened that day. Indeed, Miss Jourdain asked her school's French teacher whether the Petit Trianon was supposed to be haunted, only to be told that no less a person than Marie Antoinette was supposed to be seen sitting on the lawn on a certain day each August! Once Miss Jourdain heard this, she checked the dates, only to find that 10 August was the anniversary of the sacking of the Tuileries in 1792! The women began to wonder whether they had "entered within an act of the Queen's memory", as they later put it, and had returned to see the grounds and people as they were over 100 years before.



ABOVE: Miss CAE Moberly (left) and Miss EF Jourdain (right). Their trip to Versailles started a famous legend.

No less a person than Marie Antionette was said to haunt the Versailles lawn

At the beginning of 1902, Miss Jourdain revisited Versailles to try to determine whether the paths they had traversed the previous summer were contemporary or not. As she crossed a bridge by the 'Hameau', she started to have an eerie feeling, and observed two labourers loading a cart with sticks. After looking away and back again, she suddenly "could not see any trace of them" or their cart. She felt odd, and heard strange music apparently played by a band which she could not see. She felt the sensation of the rustle of dresses nearby but saw no one.

From 1902 until 1904, Eleanor Jourdain made a number of trips to the gardens, and told Annie Moberly that the landscape was completely different from how it had been on their original visit: for example, she was unable to find the gazebo and the bridge they had seen on their first trip. And in a joint visit in July 1904, the two women observed that the grounds were crowded with visitors. This was totally at odds with their experience in 1901, when they saw only five people in the relevant parts of the gardens: the two gardeners, the repulsive man at the kiosk, the running man, and the seated lady. Furthermore, the layout of the paths seemed to have changed. As a result of these apparent discrepancies, they decided to research the history and changing topography of the gardens of Versailles; research which would eventually be published as *An Adventure* in 1911.

"AN ADVENTURE"

Reading it now, one is struck at how detailed and thorough the work seems to be – on the surface, at least. There are plans, lists, and a unique nomenclature: 'The Chapel Man'; 'The Plough'; 'The Guards'; 'The Running Man' and many more items analysed than we have space for here. One is reminded of modern conspiracy theory with its own lexicon of characters and incidents (there's a 'Running Man' in JFK assassination lore, of course). There is also a 19-point list under the heading "Answers to questions which we have been asked". These are clearly to head off actual or anticipated criticism, and they make a case for having had no in-depth knowledge of Versailles's history or traditions before they visited (although, of course, they had far more by the time of publication, some 10 years later).

An Adventure presents research supporting the women's belief that they had somehow gone back in time, or at least entered the consciousness of Marie Antoinette. Examples of their many conclusions are:

Neither gardeners nor any other staff at Versailles wore grey-green outfits and tri-cornered hats in 1901, which is how the women had seen them. However, the soldiers who guarded Marie Antoinette had worn similar outfits.

There was no kiosk or gazebo near the Petit Trianon in 1901, despite their belief that they had seen one. The women discovered a historic map showing a gazebo-like building at this spot. It had been taken down well before 1901.

The man with the 'repulsive face' at the kiosk looked like the Comte de Vaudreuil, a close friend of Marie Antoinette, who had had smallpox.

The running man, dressed strangely for an August afternoon, was, they concluded, a messenger sent to the Petit Trianon to warn Marie Antoinette that a mob of French citizens was heading to Versailles. This happened on 5 October 1789, the last day that Marie Antoinette would be allowed to spend at Versailles.

Various other physical aspects encountered (doors, walls, terraces) didn't correspond to the modern topology, but did appear to fit with 18th-century plans.

Annie Moberly asserted that the woman sitting by the terrace of the Petit Trianon resembled a painting of Marie Antoinette by Wertmüller.

Clearly, in the authors' minds the above points – and many others besides – led to confirmation of their view that they had experienced something profoundly strange. The publication of their story and its surrounding research caused a sensation when it appeared in 1911.

RESPONSES

So how was the story received? One of the first reactions came from Eleanor Sidgwick at the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Interestingly, the two women had given the SPR sight of earlier notes they had written on the adventure, which the SPR had rejected as having no evidential value for investigation – a rejection which in part made the ladies decide to undertake their own research in the first place. In fact there are two sets of notes written by them before the publication of the book. The earliest notes (known as A1/A2) were written up in November 1901. The date of the far more detailed notes (B1/B2) is the cause of controversy: the ladies said they were written in November / December 1901; however, they destroyed the original version after transposing the notes into a new book in 1906. The implication, critics argue, is that the B1/B2 notes were actually only written *after* the research had been well under way, and their assigned earlier date was designed to make the case for the 'time slip' more plausible. As WH Salter has said, "The destruction of original documents later to be published as the foundation of an extraordinary, supernormal experience reflects oddly on their standards of evidence."

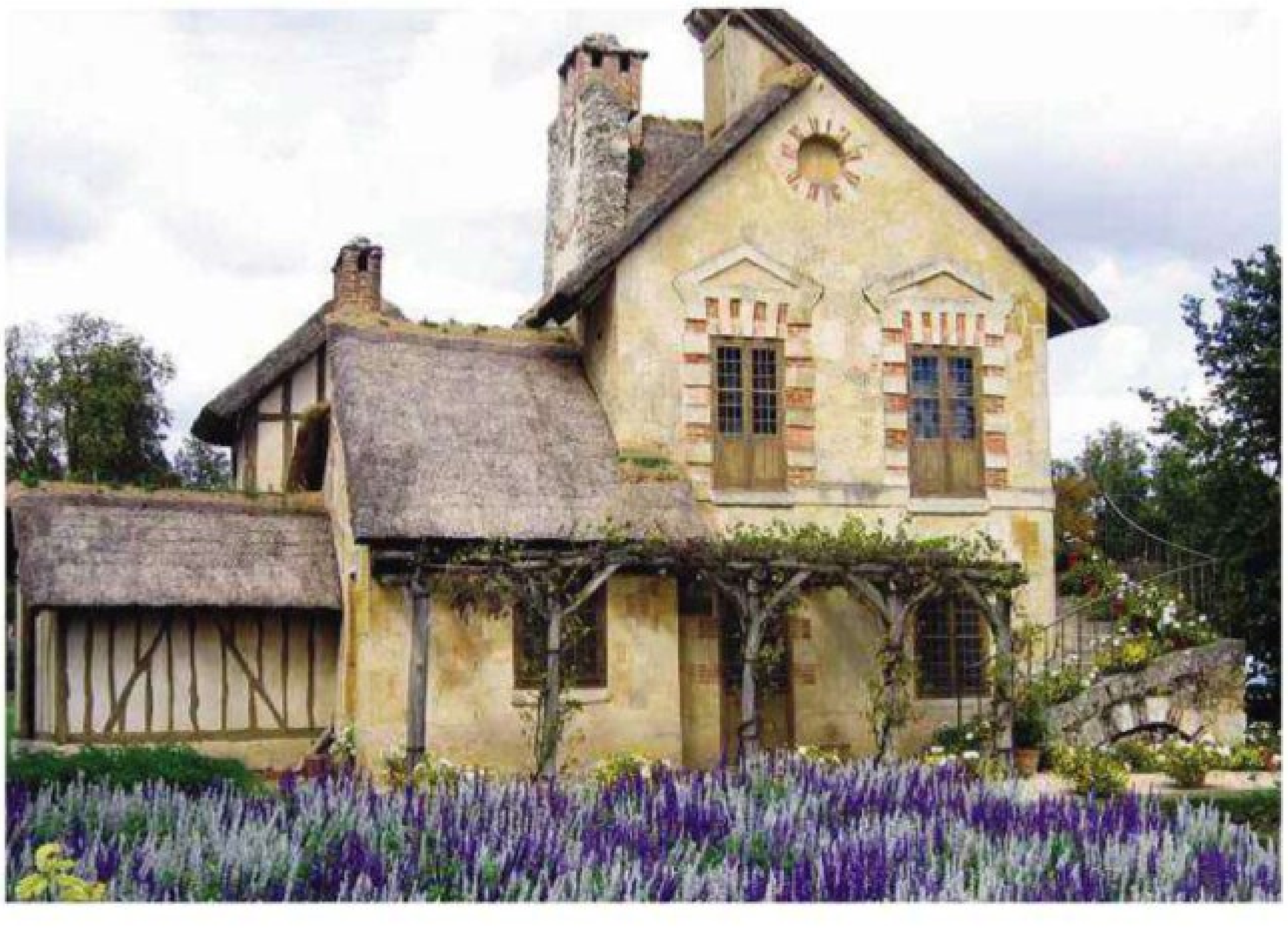
One quick example of the difference between the two sets of notes will help to make the point. In the first, Annie Moberly describes the 'Marie-Antoinette' figure and her dress in a fairly matter-of-fact way. In the later version, however, her dress is described as "old-fashioned and rather unusual", words not mentioned or even hinted at in the earlier notes. Clearly, this doesn't in itself mean she was embellishing or making things up, but it does question why *such* an important perception is not stated in the earlier notes.

Elizabeth Sidgwick's review of *An Adventure* was both highly professional and highly critical. She said there was insufficient reason to believe "anything supernormal to have occurred at all" and offered a rational explanation for the key points, mostly based on a thorough understanding of the topography of the gardens, along with opinions about the tricks played by state of mind and memory. Reviews in other journals were mixed, with some (such as Ralph Shirley in the *Occult Review*) being equally critical. It seems that the newspapers of the day were more open-minded. The *New York Times* on 21 May 1911 noted that "their little book is far more interesting than the average mystery novel" and called their story "altogether baffling". Indeed, many papers revelled in the adventure, and we can assume that, as today, many of the public would have taken their lead from the popular press rather than the somewhat sniffy tone of the SPR.

The first major book reviewing the case was JR Sturge-Whiting's *The Mystery of Versailles: A Complete Solution* in 1938. It is highly critical of the ladies' account, and Sturge-Whiting makes a detailed study of the discrepancies, additions and omissions between earlier notes and the published versions. In one example, he notes that in the published book the 'Running Man' is said to be wearing buckled shoes, where no such observation was made in the original accounts, even though it surely would have seemed odd enough to record. Sturge-Whiting visited Versailles when researching his book and as a result makes plausible assertions related to the topographical mysteries presented in the ladies' accounts. He also questions why, on their return visits, the women did not seek to interview current staff at Versailles to see if they had been the oddly dressed characters previously encountered. Essentially, he reaches the same conclusions as Sidgwick had some years before.

An alternative response came in 1945, when Lansdale Johnston published *The Trianon Case: A Review of the Evidence*. This is a curious work, essentially opining that the ladies' good background and reputation (their real identities were now known) was sufficient for them to be believed. It's an appropriate reminder that someone's character or job title doesn't ensure they must be telling the absolute truth; and that, similarly, if someone has written something they *believe* to be true, it is not the case that disproving this should see them branded as liars. For Johnston, the women were either telling the 'truth' (his view) or being dishonest.

In the 1950s, Guy W Lambert, a civil servant and former president of the SPR, wrote a series of scholarly articles on the case, much of which sprang from his analysis of the work of Antoine Richard, Marie-Antoinette's gardener. For Lambert, what the ladies experienced was a kind of hallucinogenic dream conjured up by the



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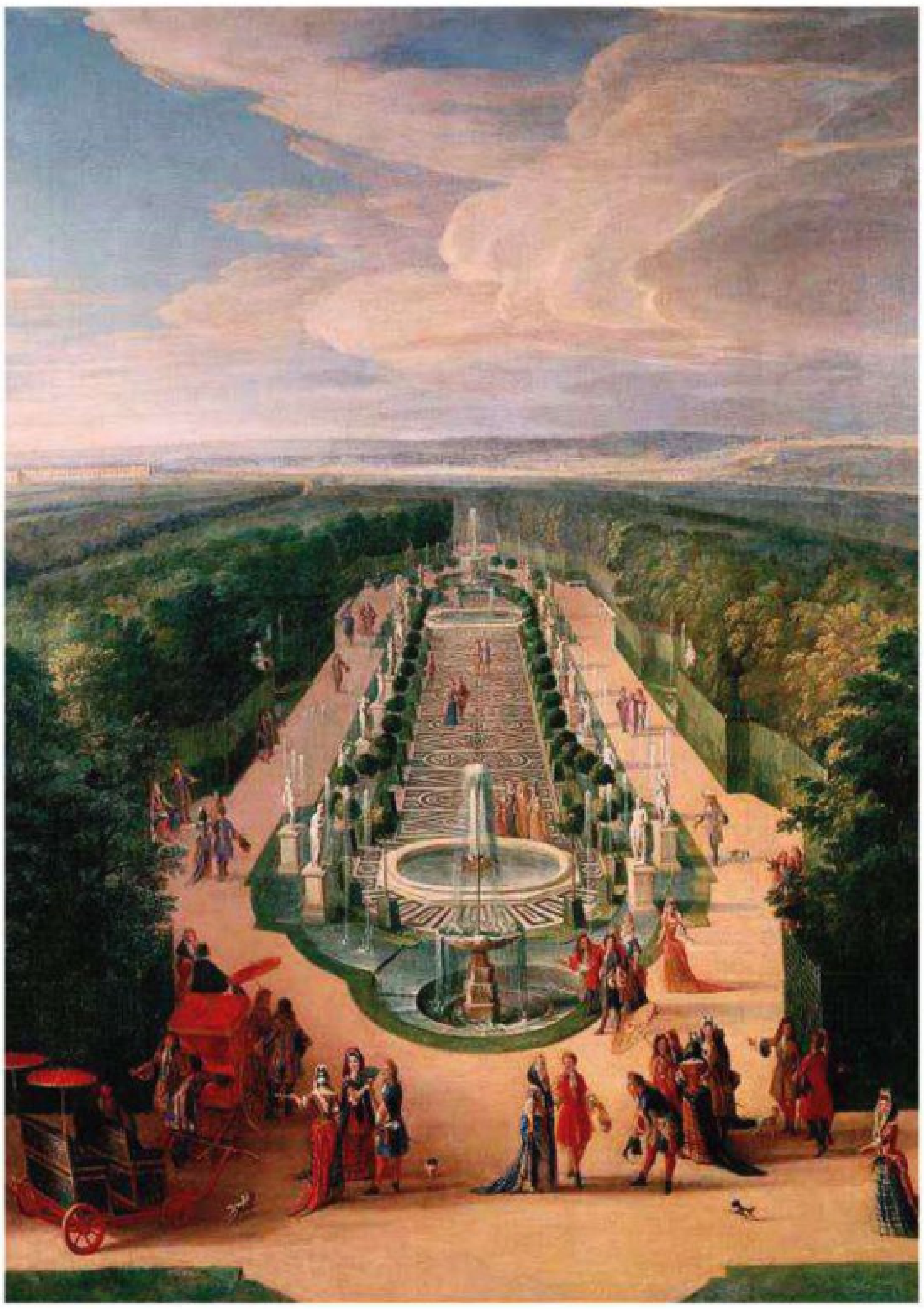
ABOVE: Rear view of the Moulin, a watermill cottage built as part of the Hameau de la Reine for Marie Antionette.

emotional mind of Richard whose 1774 master plan for the garden was turned down by the Queen in favour of a competing scheme. Lambert analyses Richard's plans and finds connections between what he had proposed for the gardens and what the two ladies claimed they saw. Somehow, suggests Lambert, they had tapped into the long-dead gardener's memories. Interestingly, Lambert becomes one of the few writers sympathetic to the ladies' story to fix a date upon the time slip, and at 1774 it is much earlier (and perhaps much less interesting in the popular mind) than the women's own favoured date of 1789.



LEFT: A 17th-century view of the Palace of Versailles Park, by Jean-Baptiste Martin.

CORBIS / THE ART ARCHIVES / ALFREDO DAGLI

GHOSTS & SCHOLARS

Arguably, the story's most famous study came with Lucille Iremonger's 1957 book *The Ghosts of Versailles*. Iremonger looked in more detail at the two women's backgrounds and found, for example, that Annie Moberly had claimed a number of psychic experiences and seemed to have a highly imaginative mind. In 1914, for example, two years after *An Adventure* was published, she visited the Louvre in Paris, where she noticed an odd man. He had "a small golden coronal on his head, and wore a loose toga-like dress of some light colour". After much research, she decided that she had seen the ghost of the Roman Emperor Constantine, who had marched down the road over which the Louvre was later built. But this dramatic conclusion was challenged when a newspaper revealed that there had been an artist living in Paris at the time of the sighting who had gone about dressed as a Roman, complete with gold crown, in protest at the ugliness of current fashions.

> *Annie Moberly had claimed a number of psychic experiences*

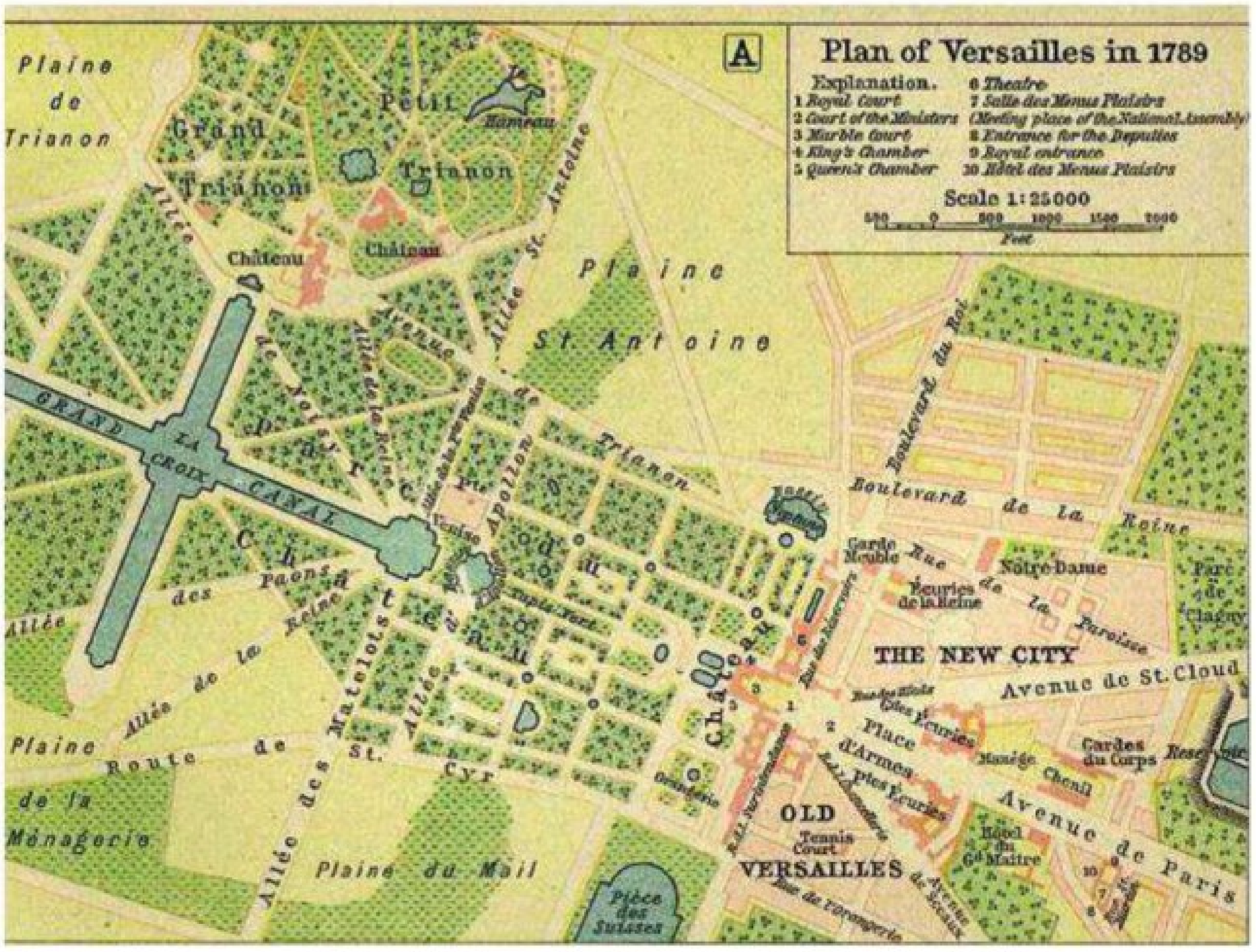
In fact, Iremonger finds that Eleanor Jourdain too had some 'previous' when it came to ghosts, having claimed to have seen spirits of Cromwell's soldiers when she was young. Iremonger produces some useful work in analysing the differences between the various versions of *An Adventure* over the years (for example, the second edition is the only one of the five to include the original A1/A2 notes, providing further grist to the sceptics' mill).

Iremonger is perhaps most scathing about the addition of detail over time to the ladies' original story, which had been noted down only three months after the original visit. She reinforces the view that nearly all this additional detail points the same way: that is, it relates conveniently to previously unmentioned 18th-century observations. In addition to the above, Iremonger contends that the so-called 'researches' were both less hefty than is often perceived, and that too many readers – and future writers – accept the points within them at face value.

Hot on the heels of Iremonger's book came another major work on the case, edited by AO Gibbons and rather grandly entitled *The Trianon Adventure: A Symposium*. As the title suggests, several writers contributed. The feel of the book is serious and studious and it includes useful illustrations and a map. It also boasts *in situ* fieldwork conducted by Gibbons at Versailles. He and his wife looked for evidence to either back up or conflict with the 'original' version of the *Adventure*. Their findings are strange, in that they seem highly sympathetic to the ladies' tale even when their researches on the ground would objectively seem not to back it up. The Gibbonses spend some time considering the various characters the ladies saw, but conclude rather frustratingly that their identification defeats them. CH Ridge writes the final section of the *Symposium* and seems, if anything, to be even more sympathetic to the ladies' story.

There have of course been more recent works related to the *Adventure*, especially in chapters within broader books on ghosts or strange experiences. Indeed, some writers well known to *FT* readers have weighed in, including Peter Underwood, Colin Wilson, Brian Inglis and Andrew MacKenzie. MacKenzie, a member of the SPR, interestingly points to a number of other cases of strange eyewitness testimony in the Versailles grounds, although these seem to have occurred *after* the publication of the 1911 book and – as MacKenzie notes – since many of the witnesses had actually read it, one wonders how useful such testimony is.

In 1976, Dr Joan Evans wrote an important piece on the case for the magazine *Encounter*. An art historian and antiquarian, she brought her objective analysis of the past to bear in the case. Highly sceptical of anything genuinely unusual having happened, she summarised the key theories on the case and put forward her own view that this was an intriguing story, but one in which the ladies "lost their sense of perspective" once they began their 'researches'. Two other significant points about Evans's work: she referenced the 1966 English-language version of the biography of the roguish aristocrat Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezenzac by Phillipe Jullian, in which the author noted that the Comte – living at the turn of the 20th century – was obsessed with the 18th century, wore clothes from that time, and liked to host fancy dress parties in the grounds at Versailles: could these have been the source of the supposedly anachronistic characters? Evans points out that as well as large parties, the Comte also hosted small-scale ones for his close friends. And it is these, she posits, which were the source of the ladies' encounters. In this interpretation, of course, Miss Jourdain's comment that the girl and woman at the cottage were frozen "as in a *tableau vivant*" makes



ABOVE: The gardens of Versailles at the time of the French Revolution, which ended Marie Antionette's life.

some sense, for this is *exactly* what they were doing; and the Chapel Man was probably there to redirect any outsiders who got too near the Comte's private party. For Evans, the ladies had stumbled upon an afternoon rehearsal of the *tableau*.

The second significant point about Evans's research is that she had become the copyright owner of the ladies' published work. For her, the 1966 publication on the Comte was the final word on the case, and she resolved not to pursue further publication of *An Adventure*.

FT readers won't be surprised to hear that many *didn't* regard all this as the final word, and the case has rumbled on ever since. The story was made into a 1981 movie (*Miss Morison's Ghosts*), nodded to by an opera title (John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*), critically analysed as a lesbian *folie à deux* by literary scholar Terry Castle, and had its 'strange music' reconstructed by a music professor. In 1988, Dr Michael Coleman produced an excellent overview of the story and its theories in *The Ghosts of the Trianon*. Coleman concluded that the later versions of *An Adventure* were considerably embroidered well after the events described and after the ladies had begun their investigations, while the original accounts had little or nothing in them to suggest a supernatural experience. He also questioned the depth of the two women's research, noting that unreliable works were used and sources went unnamed. Coleman's work is an excellent primer for those new to the case.

Most recently, plenty of debate about the case continues online – much of it inevitably ill-informed or proffered as objective truth, of course: "Either it's a hoax written by two dried up old academic spinsters trying to bring a little excitement into their lives and get attention, or they really did travel back in time somehow" – typical comment on a blog, from May 2010. Note two obvious errors: the idea that the ladies were academics, and the notion they were 'dried up' spinsters (Eleanor Jourdain was 37 at the time of the first visit, hardly dried up even in 1901!).

ONE HUNDRED (AND TEN) YEARS ON

So where do we now stand with this most extraordinary adventure, this startling tale of high strangeness, some 100 years on? Firstly, it's worth commenting on its enduring appeal. In a way, despite its age, it still has potential mass appeal to the modern market: culture clashes, ghostly celebrities, hauntings, time slips, a beautiful setting, theories and counter theories. And at its heart the simple elegance of it all: two respectable English women go for a walk in a historical garden.

What really happened? I believe that the two ladies *genuinely* thought they experienced something strange. A deliberate hoax does not seem to fit with what we know of their personalities and reputation. Neither is it clear what their motive would be for making it up. The profit motive suggested by some seems unlikely given the careers they had and the fact they had no way of supposing that any book they published would become a bestseller. In addition, their research was conducted with gusto and took some considerable time and effort, pointing to a serious motivation. Indeed, their efforts can be checked out today, as their diaries, notes and photographs are held for researchers' use at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

My feeling is that on a hot day in a strange place they got lost in the grounds and a sense of eeriness descended, possibly (though not necessarily) as a result of encountering the Comte's *tableau* players. Who hasn't experienced pangs of anxiety in such a state? And, of course, in such a beautiful and tragic spot, such feelings may be even more acute. Interestingly, once you are familiar with the story, it's pretty difficult to visit the gardens at Versailles and *not* feel slightly strange if you take a wrong turning and end up in a quiet area – which is quite possible, even today.

The women's initial reactions seem to point to something far less significant than a time slip. Indeed, it's my belief that the research they enthusiastically embarked upon led them to unintentionally retrofit their experiences into the given historical backdrop. I feel the fact that there were two of them is significant: the peer encouragement they gave each other as they honed and matched their experiences with the facts they gradually uncovered can easily be imagined. Ultimately, they were let down by the quality and scope of their own research, and by their poor contemporary recording of events. If these had been of a higher quality, some of the critical assertions thrown their way over the years would have been far less damaging. I think that when they began looking into the matter, the two women (to reference Fox Mulder) *wanted to believe*. I've called this piece "An adventure in time" very deliberately, as a nod to how long it took them to publish their story: 10 years of crafting and editing which, ironically, made subsequent researchers more rather than less critical.

In spite of my conclusions, I have a fond desire to be proved wrong. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future we'll hear about some modern-day tourist at Versailles, turning onto one of the quieter paths on a warm summer's day, and stumbling across two ladies in old-fashioned dress, puzzling over their Baedeker, their adventure just about to begin... **FT**

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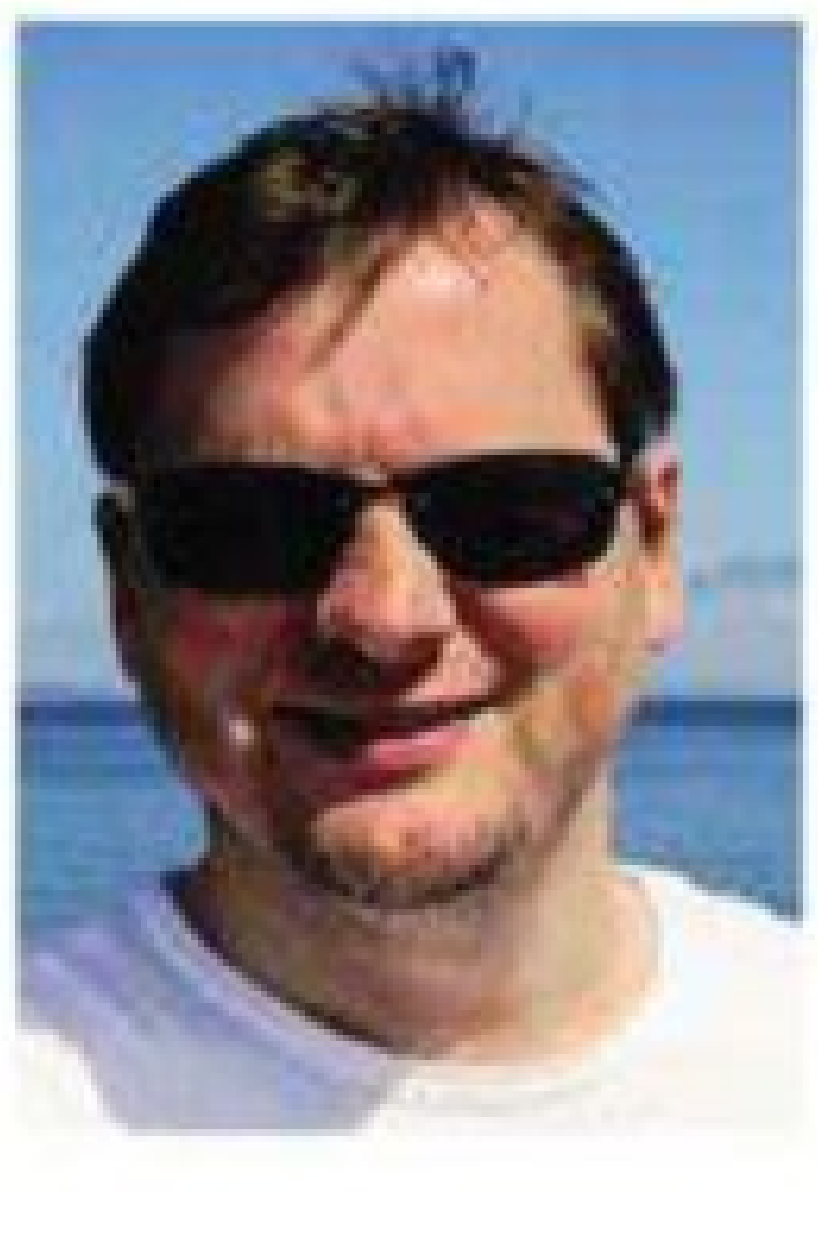

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CANINE INTELLECTUALS

JAN BONDESON reveals how an early-20th-century German obsession with the supposedly superior intelligence of horses and dogs gave birth to a 'new animal psychology' and created a host of canine celebrities noted for their philosophical thought, ardent patriotism and even poetry.

Pictures from the author's collection except where otherwise indicated.

One of the leading German intellectuals of the early 1900s was Rolf, a resident of Mannheim. With his superior intelligence, he successfully dabbled in mathematics, ethics, religion and philosophy. He speculated about the *Urseele*, the original soul of God, and his stipulation that every animal should be defined as a part of this abstract concept attracted much notice from other German philosophers. An avid reader and a talented poet, Rolf kept up a large correspondence with kindred spirits all over Europe.

In her biography of Rolf, his friend and secretary Frau Paula Moekel heaped praise on his character: the great thinker was generous, unselfish and compassionate, although his life had not been devoid of sorrows. Rolf had married a giddy and thoughtless young wife, who was not his intellectual equal, mastering only basic mathematics and entirely lacking interest in philosophy. These differences did not prevent them from having 10 children, but several of them died young due to various calamities. After his young son Roland had been run over, Rolf swore revenge against the careless motorist; whether he succeeded in tracking down the driver is unfortunately not recorded. Rolf did not lack violent tendencies: one of his favourite pastimes, albeit frowned upon by the squeamish Frau Moekel, was hunting rats. Once, when having a dispute with another intellectual, Rolf lost his temper and seriously injured his opponent in a fight.

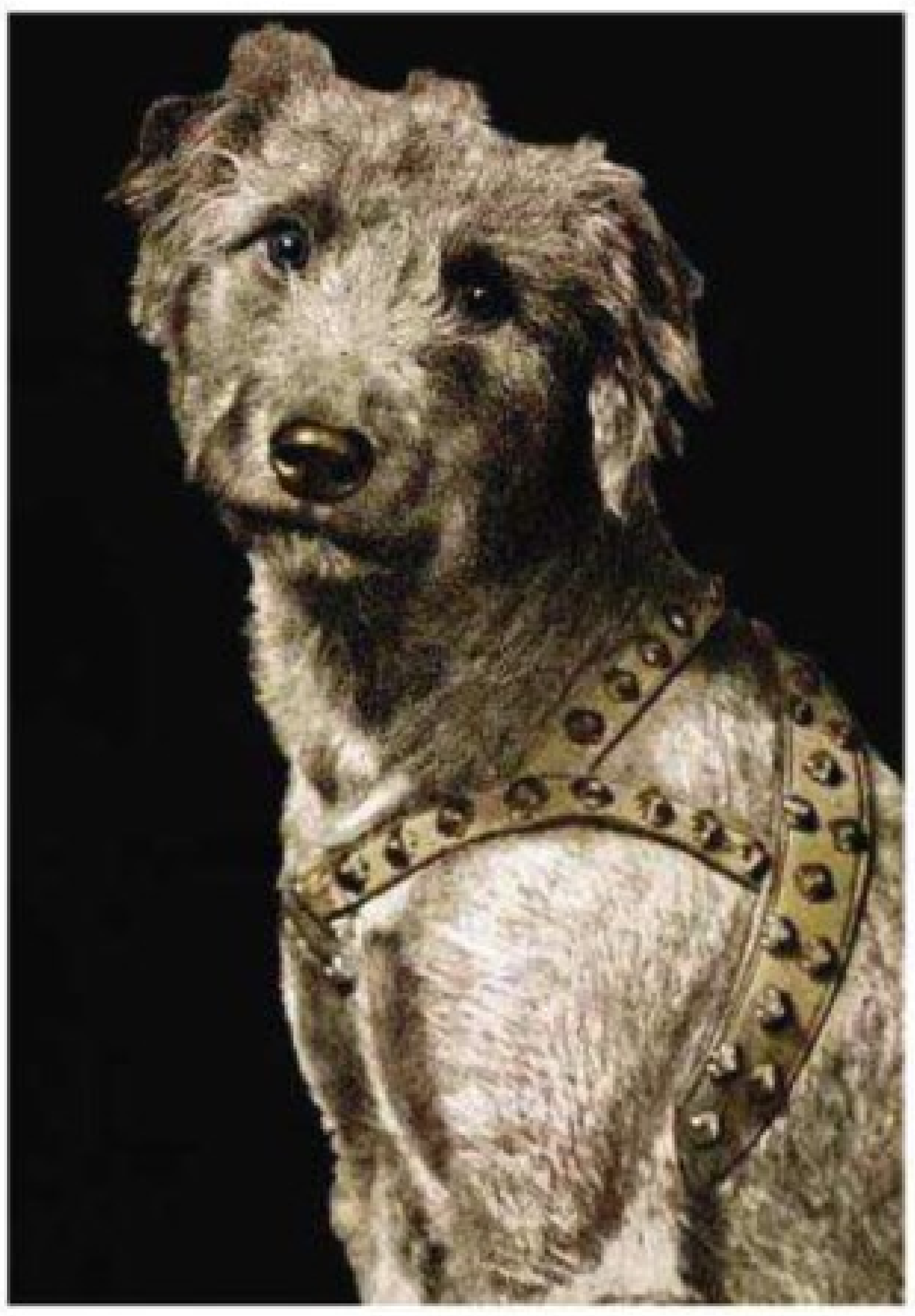
After the outbreak of the Great War, Rolf declared that the conflict was legitimate, since in his opinion, the French had invaded sacred German soil. As the war went on, the great thinker gradually changed his mind: he expressed pacifist, and even proto-feminist, opinions, declaring that if women had been left in charge, Europe's great nations would never have gone to war. After Rolf's death from pneumonia, in 1919, his autobiography and a selection from his letters were published posthumously.

Rolf's life's work has not stood the test of time as well as that of his contemporaries Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse. Still, his accomplishments were far from negligible – particularly since Rolf (below) was a dog, an Airedale terrier to be precise.

THE REMARKABLE ROLF

Frau Paula Moekel was the invalid wife of a wealthy Mannheim solicitor. In 1911, she had obtained from the local animal shelter a young Airedale terrier named Rolf, who soon displayed some remarkable gifts.

It had all started, Frau Moekel claimed, when she was trying to teach one of her daughters simple arithmetic. Since the little girl was quite uneducable, Frau Moekel called Rolf over, telling her daughter that she was sure even Rolf could tell what 2 + 2 was. The dog sauntered up and struck her hand four times with his paw!



Frau Moekel tried other mathematical problems, only to find that Rolf was equally proficient in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. She realised that by simply watching the Moekel children's lessons in mathematics, this amazing dog had learnt much more than them! The next thing was to teach him to spell. Frau Moekel let Rolf develop his own alphabet, by speaking out the letters and allowing the dog to assign them a certain number of taps with his paw. It is weird, and certainly indicative of a superior intellect, that the less common letters of the alphabet were the ones demanding the highest number of taps; either Rolf or someone else seems to have been concerned that it should not take him all day to tap out his messages. There were abbreviations for "Yes", "No", "Piddle", "Tired", "Bed" and other words Rolf thought he might find useful.

Once he had his alphabet, there was no stopping Rolf. His vocabulary steadily increased, he learnt grammar, and he formulated sentences. He learnt to read, and to answer questions. When asked to express his feelings about cats, Rolf tapped out "Lol imr hd dsorn wn sid kdsl frleigt son wgn graln". Fortunately, Frau Moekel knew how to translate this into proper German. Firstly, Rolf referred to himself as 'Lol'; secondly, he used 'phonetic' spelling, tapping out the words as they sounded when spoken; thirdly, he sometimes left words out; fourthly, he often used words from the local Pfalz dialect. What the super-intelligent dog meant was of course "Rolf immer hat Zorn wenn [er] sicht Katzel, vielleicht wegen [der] Krallen" (Rolf is always angry when he sees cats, perhaps because of the claws). In fact, the only member of the feline tribe Rolf could abide was Frau Moekel's little cat Daisy, with whom he had grown up. The

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ABOVE: Rolf is seen here counting out his thoughts with his devoted mistress Frau Moekel. He was better at sums than her own children and was a noted philosopher.

reader will not be surprised to learn that Daisy was a super-intelligent cat, albeit only capable of doing simple sums, and tapping out a word or two when she felt like it.

One of the first scientists to investigate Rolf was Dr William McKenzie, a psychologist active in Genua (Genoa). When he gave his *carte de visite* to Rolf to read, the dog impressed him by tapping out "Magnzi" and "Gnua". When asked what he liked best, Rolf replied "Laks sn" – of course meaning "Lachs essen" (to eat salmon). His second favourite occupation was reading illustrated books. Showing not only amazing intelligence, but also colour vision superior to what scientists today attribute to dogs, he correctly identified some multi-coloured geometrical shapes. He preferred women to men, because he liked their long hair and elegant gowns. Autumn he defined as "Time when there are apples" and a crocodile was an "Odd beast". Finally, Dr McKenzie tried to trick Rolf, by asking him which was the heaviest, a pound of lead or a pound of feathers; after thinking hard, the educated dog replied "Gein!" – "Neither!"

Rolf had a mind of his own. Once, when he had been stubborn during his exercises, Frau Moekel called him a "Dummkopf" [fool]. "You are one too, Mother!" the dog was quick to retort. Another time, when Frau Moekel had been sitting up late at night writing letters, he angrily tapped out "Go to bed! Rolf wants the room to be dark!" He refused to do any schoolwork on Sundays – perhaps from reverence towards the Almighty, Frau Moekel speculated. Like a proper Airedale terrier, Rolf liked hunting rats, sometimes even digging them out of their holes and lairs in the Moekels' large garden. Frau Moekel very much disapproved of these activities. She reminded Rolf of his own speculation that every animal, even a rat, was a part of the *Urseele*, but the dog would not listen to her.

ROLF PREFERRED WOMEN TO MEN, LIKING THEIR LONG HAIR AND ELEGANT GOWNS

Rolf usually liked to have visitors, but sometimes he could be more than a match for them. He did not like to be put on show, and when a journalist once asked him to extract some cube roots, Rolf replied: "Tell him to extract them himself." When informed that his visitor had come all the way from Berlin, the haughty dog dismissed him with the words "Then let him go back to Berlin!" Nor did Rolf appreciate a visit from a noble lady, Frau von Schweigenbarth; he was disrespectful throughout their conversation, even likening her to a jackass. To the noblewoman's astonishment, the headstrong dog insisted on asking her questions rather than the other way around. When asked what 5 + 9 was, she first answered "13" and the dog tapped out "Wrong!" She next gave the correct answer, but the dog again tapped out "Wrong!" Both Frau Moekel and the visitor were flabbergasted, but Rolf tapped out "I was only teasing you!" When Frau von Schweigenbarth asked Rolf if there was anything else the dog would like her to do, the witty Airedale terrier responded: "Could you wag your tail?"

Already in 1913, Rolf had some imitators. When one of them, a little dog capable of tapping out messages and doing sums, came to visit the great Rolf, Frau Moekel waited with bated breath to see what they would say to each other. But when the visiting dog instead decided to chase Daisy the cat, the angry Rolf bit him hard; the two canine intellectuals had to be forcibly separated by Frau Moekel and her daughter.

Frau Moekel had several children, all of whom were very fond of Rolf. Sometimes, the super-intelligent dog was kind enough to help them with their schoolwork, particularly mathematics, an area in which he excelled.

After Frau Moekel had decided that Rolf should have a family of his own, she purchased a young Airedale terrier bitch named Jela. At first, Rolf was delighted to have a wife, although he sometimes seemed to be ashamed of the foolish Jela, who was unable to progress beyond simple calculations. Once, when she failed to give an answer to "What is 5 + 6?" he struck her on the back eleven times with his paw, to prompt her to give the correct total. The chasm between the couple's intellects did not prevent Nature from taking its course, and soon Rolf was the proud father of 10 healthy puppies. Jela was not a good mother, however: several of the puppies died in various calamities, and Rolf blamed his wife for not taking care of them properly.

Another of Rolf's distinguished visitors was Professor HE Ziegler of the University of Stuttgart, one of the lieutenants of Karl Krall's 'new animal psychology' movement (see panel, p39). After conducting tests with Rolf, Ziegler became entirely convinced that the dog possessed a superior intellect. At Christmas, he wanted to find out whether Rolf's excessive learning had impaired his natural instincts. He put a large rat into a box, wrapped it in festive packaging, and presented it to Rolf as a present. As soon as the box was unwrapped, the rat darted out, to the alarm of the Moekel females. Rolf took a huge leap into the air and expertly killed the rat. Prof. Ziegler was very much impressed, but Frau Moekel and her daughters were equally indignant; it had been very wrong of him, the squeamish ladies reasoned, to make the educated dog wantonly take the life of another living creature.

LEFT: Rolf's daughter Lola was another super-intelligent canine, impressing observers.

ROLF'S CHILDREN

At the outbreak of World War I, Rolf demanded to be allowed to join the Army. Although an Airedale terrier by birth, he disowned the Yorkshire roots of his forefathers, instead considering himself a very patriotic German dog. Since Rolf detested the French for having invaded his beloved *Vaterland*, he wanted to fight them at the frontline. It took all of Frau Moekel's tact and persistence to moderate his militarist zeal. After the German newspapers had announced the fall of Antwerp in late 1914, the Moekel family was elated: the children marched round the house singing "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles", and Rolf followed them, barking and showing his teeth as if he fancied himself to have contributed to this great victory. The canine strategist then excitedly ran up to Frau Moekel and tapped out: "And now for Paris!"

But as the war went on, Germany suffered some crushing defeats, prompting Rolf to change his mind. He still wanted to join the Army, but only to become a rescue dog helping wounded soldiers. In late 1915, Rolf's attitude to the war changed once more; he deplored the immense loss of life on the battlefields of Europe, and wished that women had ruled the great powers instead of men. He urged Frau Moekel to become a peace negotiator between France and Germany, but this did not happen, since the learned lady herself expired in November 1915. She had made sure that Rolf was taken care of, by her eldest daughter Fräulein Luise Moekel, a talented violinist. Throughout the war years, Rolf was visited regularly by professional or amateur animal psychologists; most of them departed convinced that the dog could really communicate with them. Rolf survived Frau Moekel by nearly four years, before expiring from pneumonia in late 1919.

LOLA WAS AS GIDDY AS HER MOTHER AND WAS ALSO VERY UNTRUTHFUL

Throughout his lifetime, the dog had kept up a large correspondence with people all over Europe, including serious German professors, schoolmasters and clergymen who wrote letters asking for his political opinions. A schoolboy, who complained that his arithmetic was not up to the standards demonstrated by the super-intelligent dog, was invited to come to Mannheim for personal tuition. Another youngster, who complained that his dog Pick was entirely unable to replicate Rolf's achievements, and that the other family dog, a dachshund, was ill, received the reply: "Greetings! Pick should be sent here, for study! Also dachshund, fetch doctor! Greetings, Rolf."

Rolf's favourite correspondent, though, was Karl Krall himself. When he sent Rolf an illustrated pamphlet about vivisection, the dog responded with a passionate appeal against these evil practices. Much of this correspondence, along with dramatic stories from his early life, can be found in Rolf's posthumously published memoirs.

The Moekels had made sure that Rolf's surviving 'children' were all provided with good homes. His daughter Ilse had been given to a kind, dog-loving clergyman, who was delighted when she began to show signs of her father's intellect, doing sums and tapping out simple messages. She could be quite stubborn and headstrong, however, having inherited her mother's giddy character, and also very untruthful. Once, when returning from a country walk, she declared that she had seen a deer with green wings and a snail with four legs!

Henny Kindermann was another dog-loving German lady. Being impressed with Krall's 'new animal psychology', she was of course very keen to obtain one of Rolf's puppies, and adopted his daughter Lola. Demonstrating an intellect equal to that of her father, the young terrier soon learnt arithmetic, and tapped out words using an alphabet of her own construction. She learnt English, composed letters, and studied music. She was also very good at predicting the weather.

Unfortunately, Lola had inherited some of her mother's flighty character. One day, she came home "in a state of great depression", as Henny Kindermann expressed it, and tapped out "My honour is gone!" Fräulein Kindermann understood that she must have enjoyed a short affair with a farmyard dog, who had basely seduced and then left her. She tried to console poor Lola, saying that her broken heart would recover with time, but the pathetic dog responded: "Only when I die!"

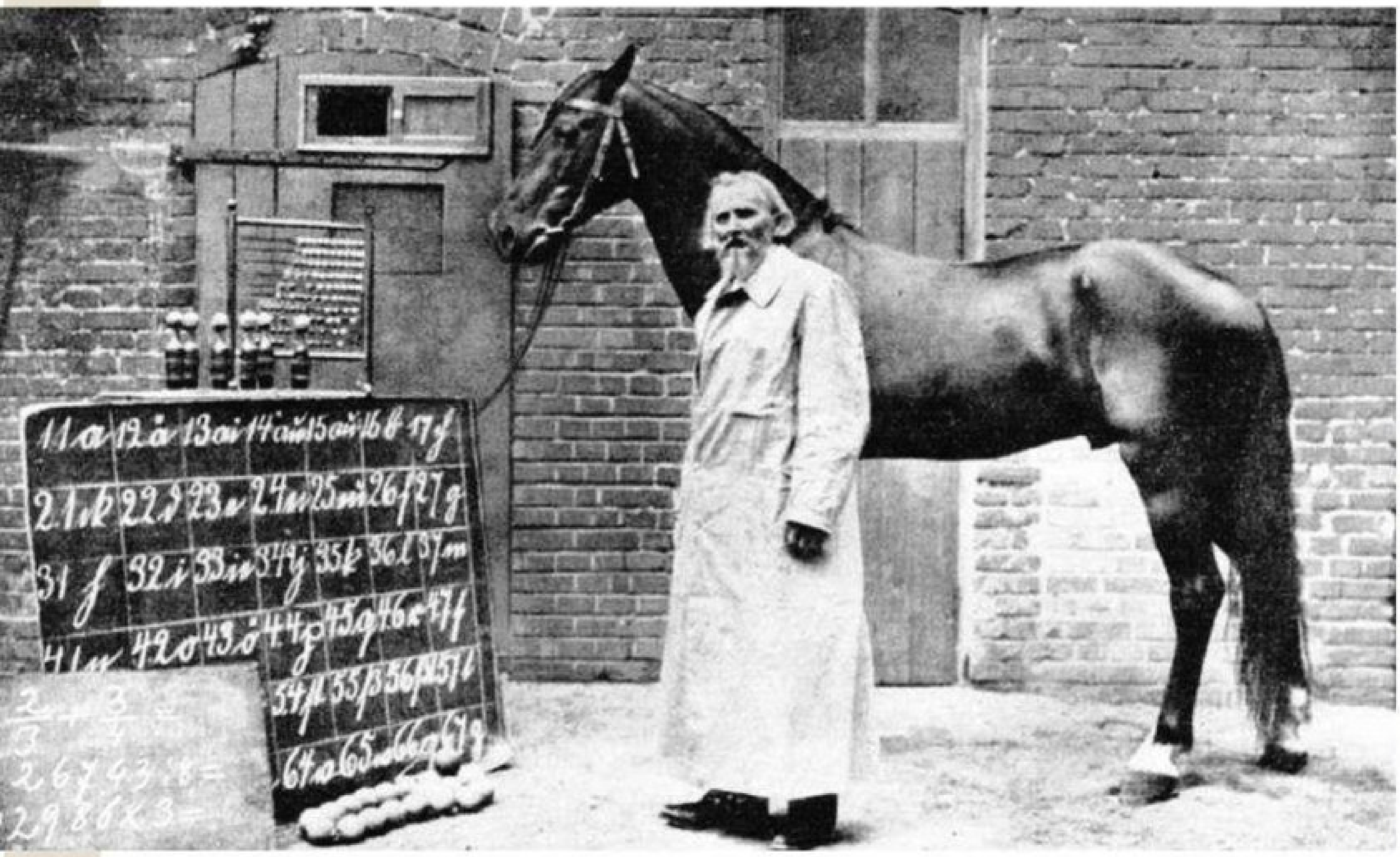
But Lola recovered from this tragedy and again began to enjoy life. In time, she 'married' another pedigree Airedale terrier and had several 'children'. One of them was given to the aforementioned Prof. Ziegler, and under his expert tuition, Rolf's grandchild Awa developed into yet another super-intelligent dog.

By the 1920s, Germany had numerous 'new animal psychologists'. The hardcore faction, led by Karl Krall himself, believed that dogs and horses were nearly as intelligent as human beings; they were capable of abstract thinking, and understanding of religion. Only want of tuition barred these animals from communicating with their owners and developing their minds. With time, Krall's own notions became even odder: in his research institute outside Munich, he sought to prove that telepathy was possible, not only between human beings, but also between human and dog. One hilarious photograph shows a white-coated individual trying his best to communicate with a poodle, with two sinister coves surveying the proceedings through some weird-looking instruments.

Some, like Ziegler and McKenzie, distanced themselves from the more sensational elements of Krall's creed. McKenzie is said to have groaned "Too much! Too much!" when Frau Moekel informed him that Rolf had started writing poetry.

Krall's death in 1928 was a serious blow to the 'new animal psychologists'. Not only

CLEVER HANS AND THE RISE OF THE NEW ANIMAL PSYCHOLOGY



LEFT: Wilhelm von Osten poses Clever Hans some tricky questions.
BELOW: Zarif shows his stuff.

The catalyst for the rise of Germany's super-intelligent animals was Wilhelm von Osten, a retired schoolmaster residing in Berlin. A well-known local eccentric, von Osten believed that horses were possessed of superior intelligence, and set out to demonstrate this in 1890 by training a horse named Hans to count by tapping his hoof. Progress was slow; Hans had only learnt to count to five by his death in 1905, and only after examining many other horses did von Osten find his ideal pupil, which he also named Hans. Hans II proved much more talented than his predecessor. He quickly learned arithmetic, and, by using a system in which each letter of the alphabet corresponded to a number, he also learnt to spell words; thus he could answer questions, tell the date and the value of coins, and recognise people from photographs.

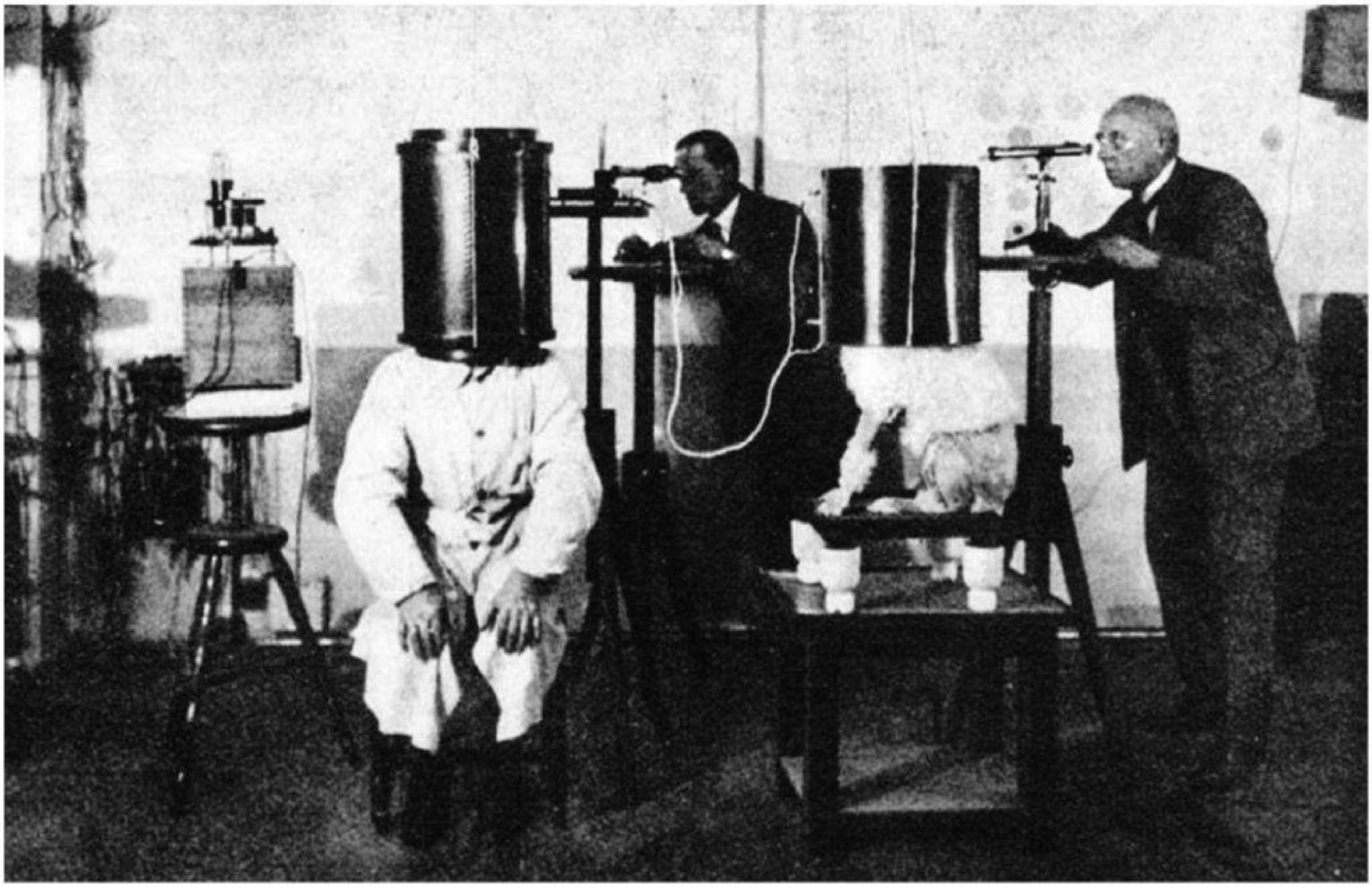
Von Osten held free public performances with his horse, and many people – both scholars and laymen – were convinced that 'Kluge Hans' (Clever Hans) really did possess a superior intellect. The horse spelt long words correctly and solved complicated mathematical problems. Hans nodded his muzzle to indicate 'yes' and shook his head for 'no'. Having finished counting out numbers with right-hoofed taps, he gave a single, emphatic tap with his left. Refusing to exhibit his horse for money, or join a circus, von Osten instead craved official recognition for Clever Hans. A commission of 13 zoologists, psychologists and military men was appointed to investigate this extraordinary horse.

One of them, Oskar Pfungst, had a low opinion of the intelligence of animals. When he saw Clever Hans perform, Pfungst noticed that the horse was closely watching the person asking the questions, whether it was von Osten himself, or someone else. He deduced that the horse was looking for an unconscious sign from his human partner. When Pfungst challenged the horse with some mathematical problems, Hans gave the right answer five out of five times when von Osten knew the answer, but none out of five when this was not the case. Moreover, Pfungst noticed that Hans over-tapped in all five instances, as if he had been waiting for some hidden cue that was not forthcoming. In a later, more ambitious series of experiments, Hans tapped out the right answer in 89 per cent of questions when he could see the experimenter, but only six per cent when he was blinkered.

Pfungst made his fortune out of debunking Clever Hans, writing a book about the case that was later translated into English; the 'Clever Hans effect' is still a term regularly used for unconscious cues from the person conducting an experiment.

Poor von Osten was disgraced, and became an object of ridicule. But the old schoolmaster still had one friend – the wealthy merchant and jeweller Karl Krall. After having seen Clever Hans perform, Krall became convinced that the horse possessed near-human intelligence, and – despite a limited knowledge of psychology and zoology – set out to rewrite the history of biology. Krall visited von Osten (who was blaming not Pfungst, but the horse, for his downfall) and explained that he wanted to carry on the work and show the world that the old schoolmaster had been right all along. Krall took over Clever Hans, purchased four more horses, and set up a research establishment of his own in Elberfeld. The Arab stallions Muhammed and Zarif were soon extracting cube roots, the pony Hänschen spelt and counted, and even a blind horse named Berto made some progress in calculations.

Wilhelm von Osten died in 1909, cursing the faithless Clever Hans with his dying breath. The ambitious Krall was now the leader. In his 1912 book *Denkende Tiere* ("Thinking Animals"), Krall openly challenged the scientific establishment. He now knew from his own experience that horses and other higher animals were well nigh as intelligent as human beings, possessing not only consciousness but also a soul. Krall's 'Neue Tierpsychologie' (new animal psychology) was widely debated at the time. One favourable reviewer lauded Krall as a second Darwin, whose great work would raise dogs and horses from serfdom; an adversary called his book "a foul and shameful blot on German literature". Still, Krall soon gathered quite a following among kindred spirits in Germany; many of them controversial characters, linked with organised quackery, spiritualism, and the antivivisection movement. In Britain and the United States, where his teachings were widely derided by the academics, he found few allies, and only a smattering of enthusiasts in Switzerland, France and Italy. At an international zoological conference in Monaco in 1913, 20 leading European zoologists signed an official protest against Krall and his activities. As a result, 'animal psychology' and 'new animal psychology' parted company for good. The wealthy Krall formed his own scientific society, and published his own journal, entitled *Tierseele* ('Animal Soul'). To bolster his wild theories, Krall was always on the lookout for other super-intelligent animals – and Frau Paula Moekel and her dog Rolf provided just the kind of support he needed.



ABOVE: Animal psychologists were keen to investigate canine intelligence in the laboratory. How the dogs felt about playing the guinea pig is unrecorded.

had he been their leading light, but his deep pockets had financed both their society and their journal. The members clubbed together to keep the journal going, although its quality suffered badly; it contained many depressingly similar accounts of educated dogs trying their best to emulate the great Rolf.

One might have expected the National Socialist regime to put an end to the 'new animal psychology', perhaps building a special concentration camp for the educated dogs and their dotty owners. But the Nazis, who had such conspicuous disregard for human rights, felt more strongly about animals. In their murky philosophy, a key concept was "Ganzheit von Leib und Seele", roughly meaning that there was a strong bond between the human being, nature, and society. Thus, the good Nazi was a friend of animals. In 1933, strict legislation against animal abuse was introduced, and there was much interest in animal welfare. The journal of the German animal defence league – the *Reichtierschützblatt* – carried some amazing illustrations, one of them depicting Hitler patting a horse on the nose, with the caption "Our Führer, the ideal animal friend." As a result, 'new animal psychology' flourished throughout the 1930s, with recruits from both leading academics and Nazi officials (see panel).

ROLF'S LEGACY

By 1945, many of Germany's great cities had been reduced to rubble, and the 'new animal psychology' movement was in a similar state of disarray. In 1954, Henny Kindermann tried to rally the faithful by publishing her second book on educated animals. Its title translates as *Can Animals think? Yes, they can!* As an appendix, she published a list of 102 educated animals: the earliest was Hans I, the latest a little dog doing sums as late as 1951. Frau Moekel's Daisy was the only cat on the list. The vast majority of these educated animals were dogs, and no less than 86 of these 102 educated animals hailed from Germany.

Elizabeth Mann Borgese, the daughter of Thomas Mann, was a distinguished expert on maritime law, and also a propagandist for animal rights. After she had settled near Florence in Italy in the 1960s, she became interested in dog-human communication, and decided to teach her English setter Arli to operate a modified electric typewriter with his nose. The dog gradually became more proficient, although for some reason, he adhered to three- or four-letter words. Since he was very fond of motoring, he often wrote "arli go car." Like Rolf, he also wrote some poetry, a selection of which has been published in a literary magazine, including his masterpiece "bed a ccat":

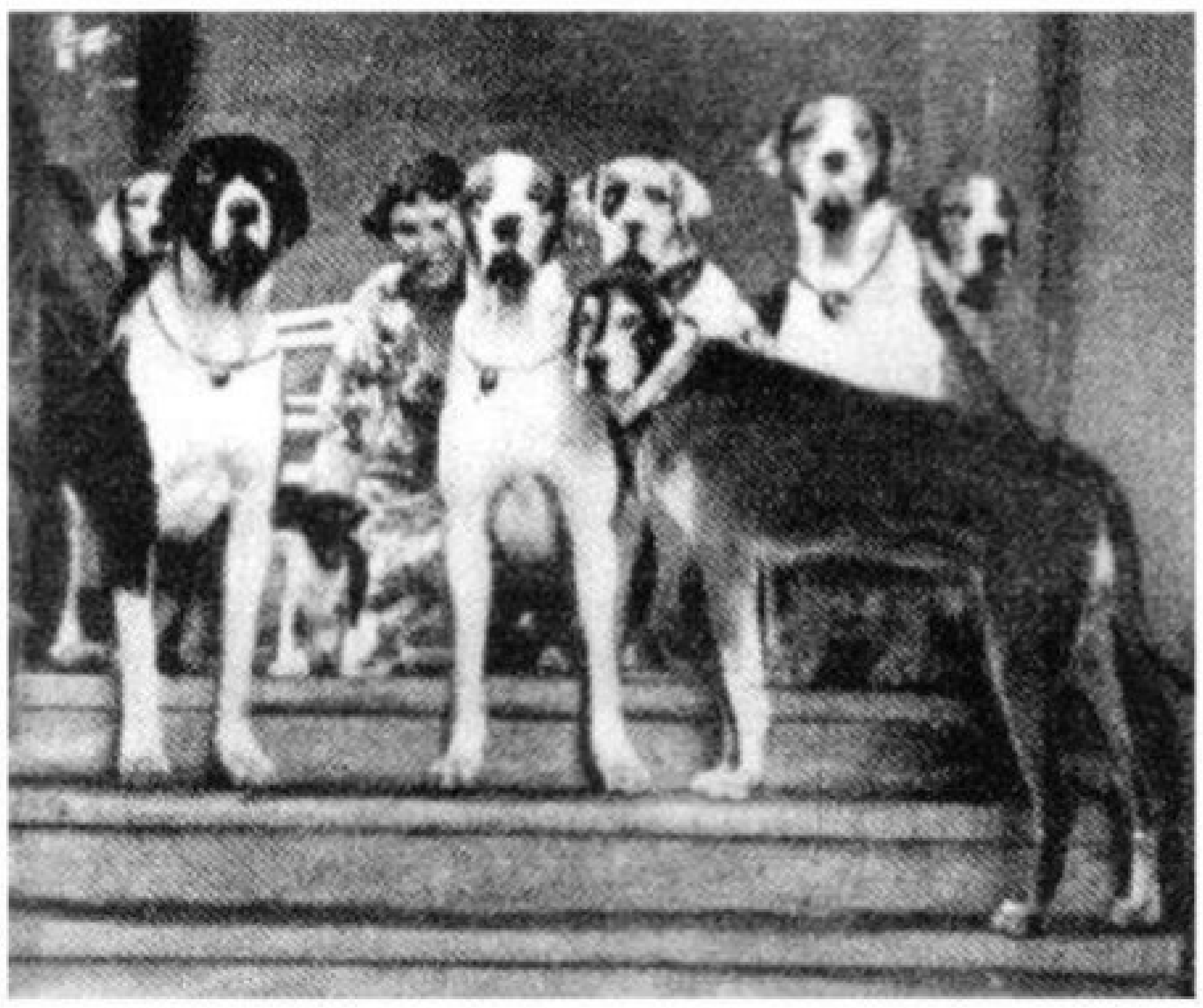
cad a baf
bdd af dff
art ad
abd ad arrli
bed a ccat

Although the 'new animal psychology' was a spent force, intelligent canines have come to the fore. As recently as 2004, the Border collie Rico made the news as the world's cleverest dog. He understood more than 200 words, many of them the names of his various toys. In a rigorous study, which eliminated the 'Clever Hans' effect (see panel on p39), Rico was invited to pick out a named toy among nine others, getting it right 37 times out of 40. In addition, he responded correctly to a new word being introduced, using a canine equivalent to the 'fast mapping' mechanism to associate the unfamiliar word with the unfamiliar object situated among the familiar toys. This extraordinary dog remembered the new word he had learnt, again picking out the right toy after several weeks.

In 2008, Rico was rivalled by Betsy, another Border collie with a vocabulary of 340 words. She also knew 15 people by name. When showed a picture or drawing of a certain object, this amazing dog used the two-dimensional image to guide her to the right toy, even if she had never seen either picture or toy before.

Domestic dogs are highly skilled in reading human social and communicative behaviour. Whereas tame wolves proved to be clueless with regard to following human communicative signals to find hidden food, dogs excelled in the same test, even surpassing non-human primates. This raises the possibility that there has been convergent evolution, with dogs and humans developing intricate social-communicative skills to aid their close interaction and cooperation (see **FT269:14**). After all, over the last 100,000 years, the social environments of dog puppies and human children have become increasingly similar, and this

SUPER DOGS OF THE THIRD REICH



BEST IN CLASS: The Nazi dog school, credited with remarkable intelligence.

There was no shortage of educated dogs in the Third Reich. In Weimar lived the super-intelligent fox terrier, Lumpi, who received visits from the anti-vivisectionist Duchess of Hamilton and the enthusiastic zoologist Ludwig Plate, who declared that Lumpi could understand spoken German, read simple sentences, and answer questions by tapping, just like Rolf; more sceptical scientists disagreed.

The dachshund Kurwenal, another resident of Weimar, was even more remarkable. Prompted by his owner, the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, he spoke by barking, using an alphabet going forward from A to L, and backward from Z to M. Thus, 'A' and 'Z' were one bark, whereas 'L' and 'M' were 12; at the end of each letter, one or two barks signified whether Kurwenal had started from 'A' or from 'Z'. Kurwenal could read, and he had considerable knowledge of literature, correctly identifying "To be or not to be..." as the work of Shakespeare.

According to his biographer Otto Wulf, Kurwenal had been taught since the age of six months, and presented with his barking alphabet on his second birthday. The opinionated little dog liked pink roses and pretty ladies, and had fantasies about eating large cheeses and big fat cats. He preferred Goethe to Schiller, but also liked reading illustrated zoology books. When asked whether he wanted to become the father of little dachshund-babies one day, his answer was an emphatic "No!"

On Kurwenal's birthday, he was visited by a troop of 28 uniformed youngsters from the Nazi animal protection organisation. When their leader started reading a long congratulatory poem to Kurwenal, the little dog stopped him after a few stanzas, barking out "No more poetry!" To prevent further unpleasantness after this angry rebuff, a kind doctor presented Kurwenal with a large teddy bear as a birthday present, saying: "Now, does this bear not look very nice?" Looking into the bear's grinning face, the ungrateful little dog replied: "No, he looks horrible!"

In 1935, Kurwenal was investigated by Ludwig Plate, earlier a supporter of Krall and his clever horses. Plate was impressed with Kurwenal's intellect, boldly proclaiming that the dachshund could read, count and spell. The physiologist Otto Renner disagreed, and believed that the dog was receiving conscious or unconscious cues from his mistress. In an acrimonious debate, Plate was seconded by Munich zoologist Max Müller, whereas Renner had support from several other scientists.

Unlike Rolf and Lola, who had both been quite attractive dogs, Kurwenal was not a pretty sight. A very fat little dachshund, reddish yellow in colour, he barked incessantly (a single word could require 85 barks!) in a hoarse, coughing voice. As he waddled around, greedily eating the titbits the Baroness kept rewarding him with, he himself looked very much like a thick German sausage with four very short legs. In addition, Plate, who certainly made some very queer deductions for someone supposed to be a distinguished zoologist, asserted that Kurwenal's private parts had atrophied due to his high level of mental activity!

Once, when Max Müller and the Baroness discussed the possibility of making sausages out of dog meat, as a measure of wartime economy, the 'sausage dog' felt inclined to object that "The Christian religion prohibits killing!" When a professor of theology asked the dog which religious persuasion he belonged to, Kurwenal politely replied: "The same one as yourself, Sir." When a sceptical Swiss researcher tried to trick the dog, Kurwenal barked out "I answer no doubters! Go bother the asses instead!" Shortly before his death, in late 1937, Kurwenal stated: "I am not afraid of dying; dogs have souls and they are like the souls of men." The little dog was buried in the garden of the Weimar town house owned by the Baroness; although the house has been converted to offices, Kurwenal's gravestone can still be seen there.

There were some very strange experiments going on in wartime Germany concerning dog-human communication. The sinister Professor Müller, who had supported Lumpi and Kurwenal, remained active throughout the war. It is clear from his writings that he was a wholehearted supporter of the Nazi 'natural philosophy' and race biology. Another animal psychologist, Werner Fischel, was provided with dogs for his communication experiments by the staff of the *Reichführer-SS*. In 1943, a certain Frau Schmitt was featured in an article written by Müller for a Nazi magazine. She was the headmistress of *Tier-sprachschule ASRA*, a school that was supposed to teach large, muscular German mastiffs to communicate with humans. Müller claimed that some of them had already said a few words. At a Nazi study course, a talking dog was once asked, "Who is Adolf Hitler?" and replied: "Mein Führer!"

According to Müller, representatives of the Wehrmacht had received directions from the Führer to satisfy themselves concerning the usefulness of these educated dogs in the field. Were the Nazis trying to develop a breed of super-intelligent canine stormtroopers, capable of communicating with their human masters of the *Herrenvolk*?

HIS MASTER'S VOLK: One of Adolf Hitler's pets admires the Führer's photo.

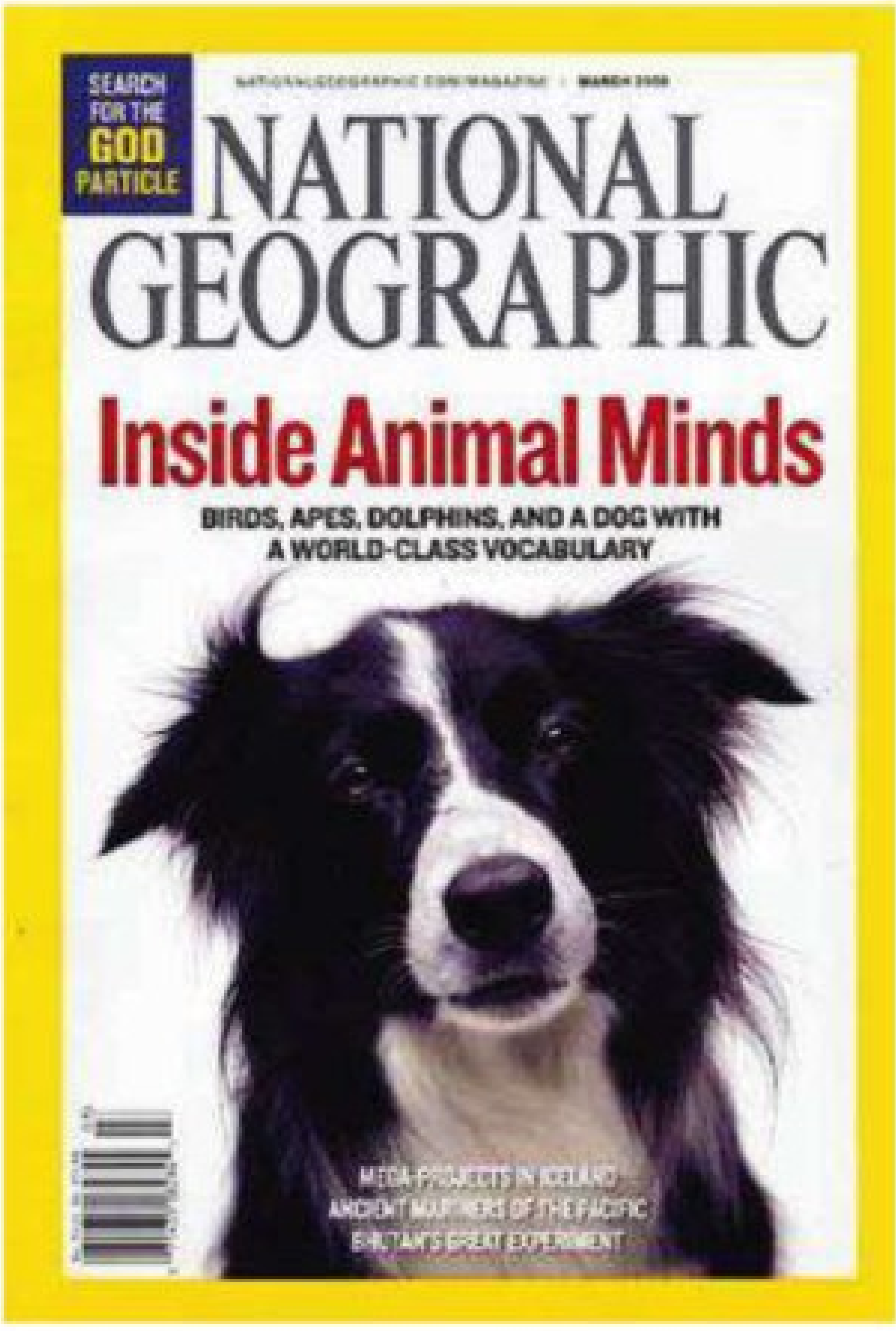
GETTY IMAGES / AFP

LEFT: Capi was another canine intellectual. **BELOW:** The subject of animal intelligence continues to fascinate the scientific community today.

intense cohabitation may well have led to dogs emulating certain skills considered uniquely human, like following complex cues and signals, or reading the humans' mindset and emotional state.

Dogs are good at tricking other dogs, or even humans, to obtain rewards. They react to unfairness: dogs taking part in an experiment where some, but not all, of the animals are rewarded for correct behaviour, tend to opt out if they consider themselves badly done by. Dogs can communicate with each other through whining and barking, and they can also communicate with humans. The dog's different barks have distinct patterns of frequency, tonality and pulsing, and are easy to identify. In another study, a dog was trained to use a simple keyboard, with signs for 'walk', 'water', food', 'piddle', 'toy' and 'petting'. The animal seemed to understand how to operate it, and made intelligent use of its messages to fulfil its various wishes.

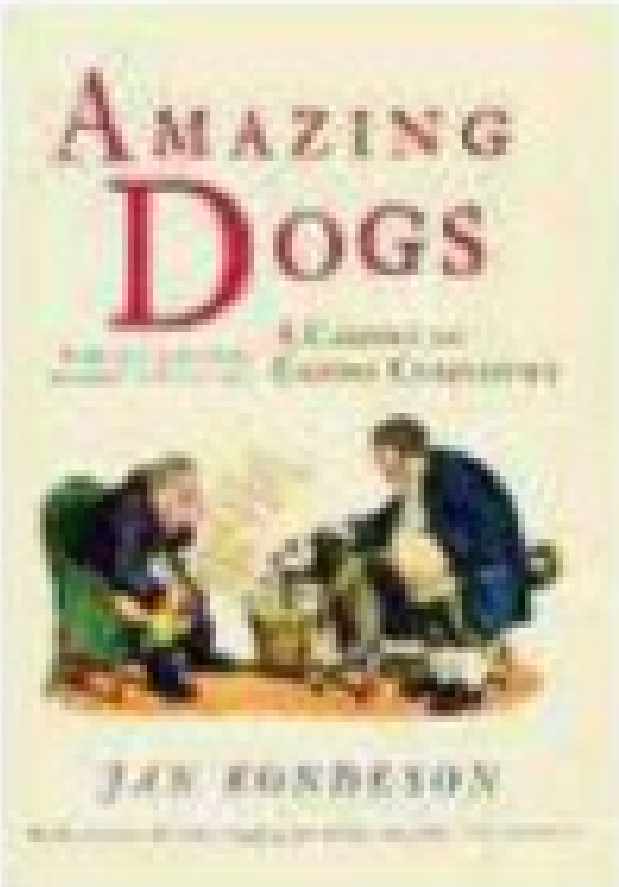
While modern research has shown that dogs are much cleverer than people give them credit for, they still have no business writing poetry, learning foreign languages, or speculating about God. There is no doubt that Oskar Pfungst was right, and that the educated horses and dogs were reacting to unconscious cues from their owners to obtain a reward. There was a strong bond between Krall and his horses, between Frau Moekel and Rolf, and between Henny Kindermann and Lola, aiding the development of such cues. Moreover, it is clear that not only Frau Moekel, but also other owners of super-intelligent dogs, interpreted the 'speech' of their animals quite freely, using their own imagination and expectations to correct mis-spellings and fill in words the dogs had 'forgotten'. When Rolf speculated about the *Urseele*, claiming that each animal had a soul, he echoed a pet theory of Frau Moekel herself. And the episode of Lola's 'lost honour', re-told in such a pathetic manner by Henny Kindermann, tells us more about the psychology of this prim German lady, than about that of her dog.


SEARCH FOR THE GOD PARTICLE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
Inside Animal Minds
BIRDS, APES, DOLPHINS, AND A DOG WITH A WORLD-CLASS VOCABULARY
MEGA-PROJECTS IN ICELAND
ANCIENT MARINERS OF THE PACIFIC
BHUTAN'S GREAT EXPERIMENT

A clever doctor named Wilhelm Neumann came to see Rolf after Frau Moekel had died. Neumann was accompanied by another doctor, named Ferdinand Lotmar; they both politely introduced themselves to the educated dog, but without Lotmar allowing Luise Moekel to hear his second name. Depressed by the wartime rationing, the educated dog tapped out "Give poor Rolf money to buy sausages!" and the doctors were kind enough to give him some coins. Neumann then asked Rolf to spell out the second name of his colleague, but Rolf just tapped out "Cannot do it" even when the question was repeated. But after Neumann had whispered to Luise Moekel that perhaps the name Lotmar was too difficult for Rolf to spell, the dog spelt it perfectly. The two doctors left the Moekel house, their cunning plan a complete success: Rolf was only able to communicate when Luise Moekel knew the answer! Neumann reckoned that a slight movement of the board Rolf was tapping on constituted the unconscious cue for the dog to stop tapping.

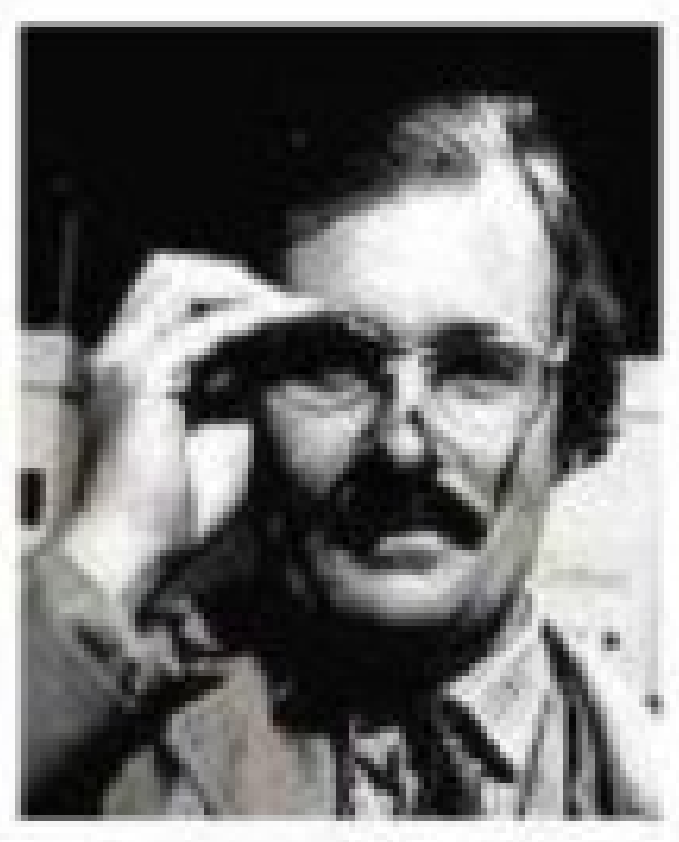
It would be unreasonable to accuse the kind, dog-loving Paula Moekel and Henny Kindermann of deliberately falsifying their conversations with their dogs. They were both honest, reputable people, who refused to gain money by exhibiting their canine charges. It is also important to note that the people involved in the 'new animal psychology' were neither foolish nor obviously mentally deranged (with the possible exception of the original prophet himself, Wilhelm von Osten). Karl Krall was a shrewd, self-made businessman; Paula Moekel was an educated, cultured woman; Henny Kindermann a graduate agronomist who wrote several books about other topics; the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven a talented artist. In the 1935 debate about Kurwenal, Otto Renner tried another line of attack. He made fun of the childless spinsters who treated their dogs as their furry babies, teaching them to speak, read and count. And indeed, according to the list of educated dogs provided by Henny Kindermann, 54 out of 68 owners of educated dogs were females. But Renner's misogynist theory doesn't hold water, since Paula Moekel had numerous children, at least one of whom was a boy, before she acquired her furry 'son' Rolf, who called her 'Mother'. Henny Kindermann also married, and had at least three sons growing up to adulthood.

So, did Germany's 'new animal psychologists' achieve anything positive? Perhaps they made some small contribution to the promotion of animal welfare and rights, but they did so using arguments that were largely erroneous. Founded on pseudoscience, the movement obstructed the proper investigation of animal intelligence and dog-human interactions; it will remain an unfruitful sidetrack in the history of biology, ending with a whimper rather than a woof. **FT**



Extracted and adapted from *Amazing Dogs: A Cabinet of Canine Curiosities*, by Jan Bondeson, Amberley Publishing, £20.00.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Dr JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer and consultant rheumatologist at the Cardiff University of Medicine, and a frequent *FT* contributor. Among his books are *Queen Victoria's Stalker: The Strange Case of the Boy Jones*; *Blood on the Snow: The Killing of Olof Palme*; *Animal Freaks: The Strange History of Amazing Animals* and *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear.*

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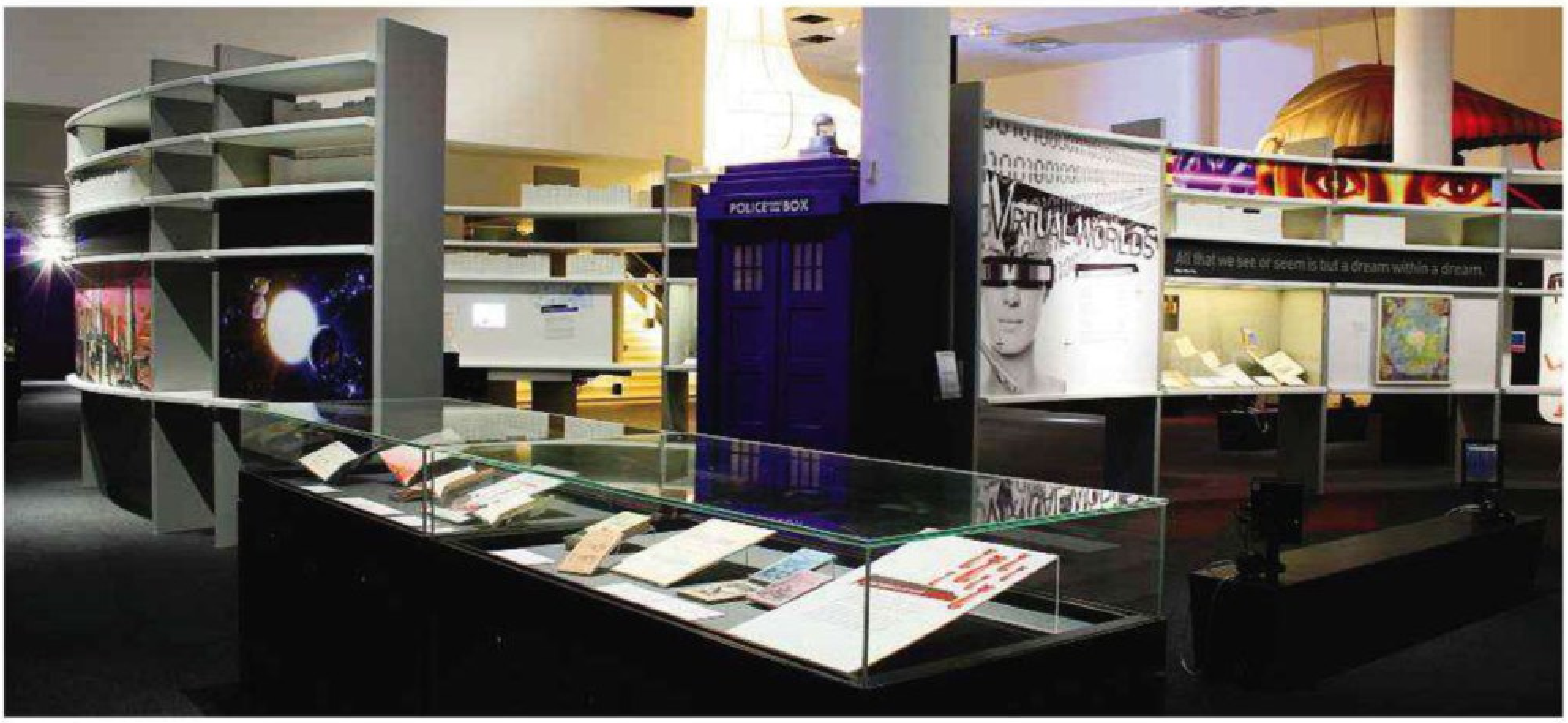
SFSPECIAL

As the British Library puts science fiction in the spotlight, we visit the exhibition, ponder the genre's classical origins and talk to a legendary artist about visualising SF's strange lands.



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OUT OF THIS WORLD

JEN OGILVIE visits the British Library's new exhibition on the history of science fiction, and wonders whether it does justice to the rich, multi-faceted genre that is literary SF.

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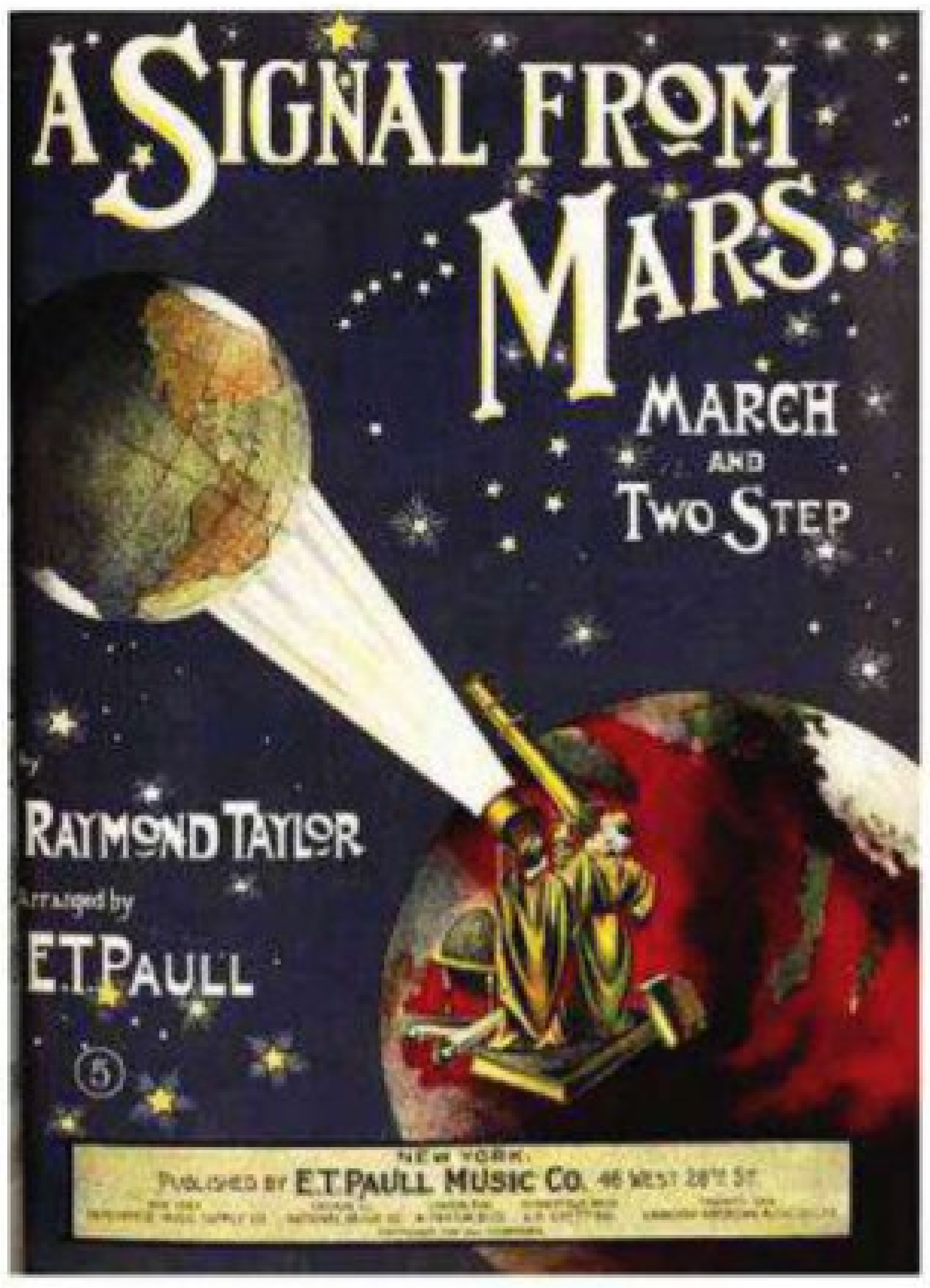


LEFT: A musical 'Signal from Mars', 1901.

FACING PAGE: Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder', published in *Collier's Weekly*, 28 June 1952.

> It would have been fun to have been fooled by the 1835 Great Moon Hoax

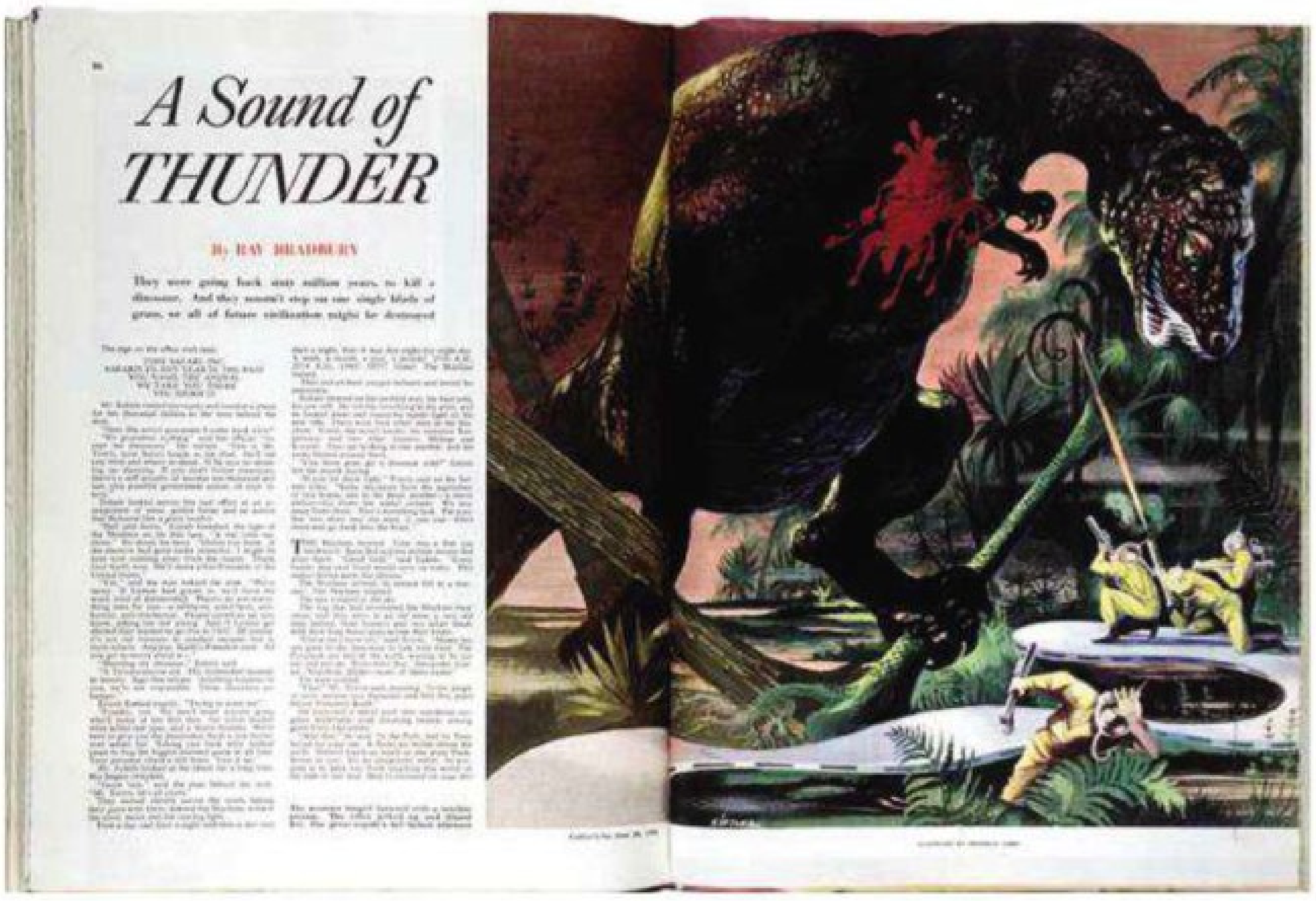
Science fiction has often been perceived as having something of an image problem, its readers ghettoised as strange men with beards, its classic texts dismissed as 'not proper literature'. A new exhibition at the British Library seeks to rehabilitate this most maligned of genres.

The curators of 'Out Of This World' are chiefly concerned with reincorporating SF into the mainstream of literary history. We begin with Lucian of Samosata's *True History* (c. AD 170), and then trawl through tales of strange foreign lands, extraordinary voyages and terrible monsters, taking in some more recognisably SF notions – Hollow Earth, leading astronomer Percival Lowell's ancient, dying Martian world – along the way.

It's a broad, but also limited, conception of SF: speculative fiction concerned with an imagined other. To give this loose collection of works some shape, the curators have grouped them by theme, by what the authors used their imagined others *for*. So we get sections on SF as satire written by the likes of Jonathan Swift; SF as a way of thinking about society's organisation – Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example; SF as expressing a fear of invasion, as in the popular 1871 anti-German serial *The Battle of Dorking*; SF as Ballardian warning of the effects of technological change on the human psyche. In their quest for relevance, the curators also make a rare concession to actual science, highlighting instances of authors who helped inspire or shape progress: the Russian writer and scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky is considered one of the founding fathers of rocketry; William Gibson has been widely credited with the invention of the concept of cyberspace.

This history of alterity (otherness) throws up some entertaining details. The apocalypse section includes "How Will The World End?" (*Pearson's Magazine*, 1900), Herbert Fyfe's sea monster invasion nightmare, complete with illustration of an attacking giant lobster. It would have been fun to be fooled – as many were, during the 1835 Great Moon Hoax – by the *New York Sun*'s reports of bat-winged humanoids on the Moon. Arthur C Clarke's story of Tibetan monks who, believing that the Universe was created so that they could write out all God's nine billion names, hire a couple of sceptical Westerners to install a computer to get the job done quickly – and so speed up the end of the world ("The Nine Billion Names of God", 1953) – is said to have made the Dalai Lama laugh. Perhaps you knew – I didn't – that meat extract Bovril got its name from Vril, an energy fluid supporting a subterranean master race in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), or that Bertrand Russell wrote an SF short story collection called *Nightmares* (1954).

But you have to work through a lot of text to get at these nuggets. The exhibition is, essentially, a roomful of books in glass cases, with the contents of each briefly summarised in explanatory panels. While this might appeal to book fetishists, the information would be more easily conveyed were it presented in book form itself. That way you wouldn't be constantly struggling to block out the platitudes spouted by talking heads on a video loop, or the sounds of a visiting women's creative writing group all loudly finding their inner voices. There are audio and film clips, but – with the exception of the fantastical Martian costumes of *Aelita* (1924), and *Hitchhiker's Guide*'s Marvin the Paranoid Android's circular argument with a mattress – these rarely add much. They feel like afterthoughts, a half-hearted attempt



A Sound of THUNDER

THE ESTATE OF FREDERICK SIEBEL

to jazz things up; as do sculptures of a UFO crashed into a bookshelf and a man falling from a giant lampshade. What might have worked better is more examples of the SF radio plays, films and TV shows that developed with the fiction, and without which this feels rather like one side of a conversation (*Doctor Who* is a rare inclusion; presumably the curators thought it had more mainstream cachet than, say, *Star Trek*).

So preoccupied is *Out Of This World* with proving SF's relevance and historical antecedents that it concentrates on the known and the obvious and loses sight of what most would consider the genre's most important elements. There are endless references to HG Wells – no doubt judged a respectable literary figure – but no explicit discussion of SF's mid-century Golden Age or the enthusiasm for science it was inspired by. Hard SF gets hardly a look in, and while currently fashionable Victorian-influenced steampunk gets its own display case, other critical stages in the evolution of the genre – Michael Moorcock and *New Worlds* in the Sixties, for example – are glossed over or ignored altogether. The imaginary worlds of the Brontës, interesting enough to Brontë fans but hardly central to SF development, are given more space than William Gibson. The curators seem unwilling to admit that SF is a genre at all, and any suggestion of embarrassing, intimidating geekery has been rigorously expunged. SF can seem niche and impenetrable, but that's why this exhibition could have been important – this was a chance to open a world up to us, show us its eccentricities and mysteries, its fashions and fascinations.

'Out Of This World' fails to quite capture SF's dynamism, the heady excitement of the strange, the futuristic and the cosmic. To an extent, this is a problem with the format; the accompanying programme of events looks like a more interesting examination of where SF is now and what it might do. But this is a timid exhibition and a missed opportunity.

Out Of This World: Science Fiction but not as You Know It, British Library, 20 May – 25 Sept. Admission Free.

ANCIENT SF?

BARRY BALDWIN asks whether science fiction, as we understand it, can be traced as far back as classical civilisation, and whether Lucian's *True History* is really the earliest example of the genre.

The British Library's new exhibition begins its history of science fiction with Lucian of Samosata's *True History* (c.AD 170), but other distinguished commentators have disagreed – and have further disagreed as to who, if not Lucian, did produce the genre's founding text.

Arthur Koestler claims Kepler's *Somnium* for the first real science fiction. Kingsley Amis too rules out Lucian ("too comic"), but also disqualifies Kepler's "fantasy". For Brian Aldiss, *Somnium* "is straightforward non-utopian astronomical exposition, and science fiction no more began with Lucian than space flight with Leonardo." While Aldiss grants that science fiction owes much to the Greeks, Amis derides this classical pedigree as scornfully as Aphra Behn's gibe at "reading foolish books, Lucian's lofty traveller who flew to heaven". Classicists themselves are divided. Bryan Reardon, Lucian's foremost translator, insists the *True History* is not science fiction – "there's no science in it". But recent articles by Fredericks and Swanson argue that it is, while Lucianist Graham Anderson suggests: "The key criterion is whether ancient concepts of scientific activity are upheld, and in this sense the label does seem admissible."

ASTONISHING THINGS

What is science fiction? The term – a stray 1851 use by William Wilson apart – comes from the 1920s. Græco-Roman portmanteau terms are "apista" and "mirabilia" – Astonishing Things. Aldiss calls it "the search for a definition of man's status in the Universe, characteristically cast in the Gothic mould". Arguing that science and scientists are not integral, Amis suggests it is "prose narrative of a situation that could not arise in our world, but one hypothesised from some innovation in science, whether human or extraterrestrial". The definitions by Aldiss and Amis paradoxically open the door to acceptance of ancient science fiction; Anderson's kicks it in. Kepler would have agreed. His *Somnium* was published in 1634, the year of Hicks's first-ever English translation of the *True History*; Lucian himself twice used this title. The hero is Duracotus, a Romanesque name suggesting toughness. He lives in Thule, the ancient brand name for mysterious remoteness. His demon guide has a precedent in Byzantine fiction. Unseen beings whispering encouragement come from Lucian and *The Alexander Romance*; nowadays we have the Taelons in *Earth: The Final Conflict*. Kepler's giant lunar life forms and topography are likewise classical.

One numerical item stands out. The Moon's Volva[1] is 15 times larger than the lunar surface, the temperature is 15 times hotter than Africa. The philosopher Philolaus (5th century BC) calculated that lunar plants and animals were 15 times the size of Earthly ones; his contemporary, Herodorus, claimed that Moon women lay eggs which hatch children 15 times bigger. Philolaus also figured a lunar day equals 15 earthly ones; Kepler has the same equation. Herodorus was a historian of sorts: when Aristotle quotes his notion that vultures come from the Moon (in Lucian, tri-headed buzzards constitute the lunar police), it is in a work of serious science, the *History Of Animals*. Kepler's hero is dazed by opiates to protect him from the force of initial acceleration, thereby anticipating modern suggestions that astronauts be anæsthetised during blast-off. Not an ancient consideration, though in Plato Er's journey to Hades is accomplished under suspended animation. Koestler commends Kepler for postulating zones of zero gravity – "that nightmare of science fiction". So, unconsciously, does Lucian, who knew nothing of gravity beyond Aristotle's notion that heavy objects fall to Earth's centre, light ones to its periphery. "All Kepler's works were cathartic; it was only fitting that *Somnium* should end with a fantastic flourish" (Koestler).

We don't know if *True History* was Lucian's last book; it is certainly his most enduring. Ancient imaginations were honed by different but convergent factors. Classical mythology provided a pervasive science fiction backdrop with its monsters (e.g. Medusa, recycled in *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*), demons (mothers threatened their children with Empusa and Lamia), and such superheroes as Perseus who outwitted Medusa and saved the naked, spread-eagled Andromeda from a sea-serpent, zooming around with winged sandals and a cloak of invisibility (before Wells, Klingons, and Romulans). It is dangerous to generalise about other people's beliefs, and we don't know how many ancients took their mythology seriously: both for believers and sceptics, it was always there. It also spilled into real life.

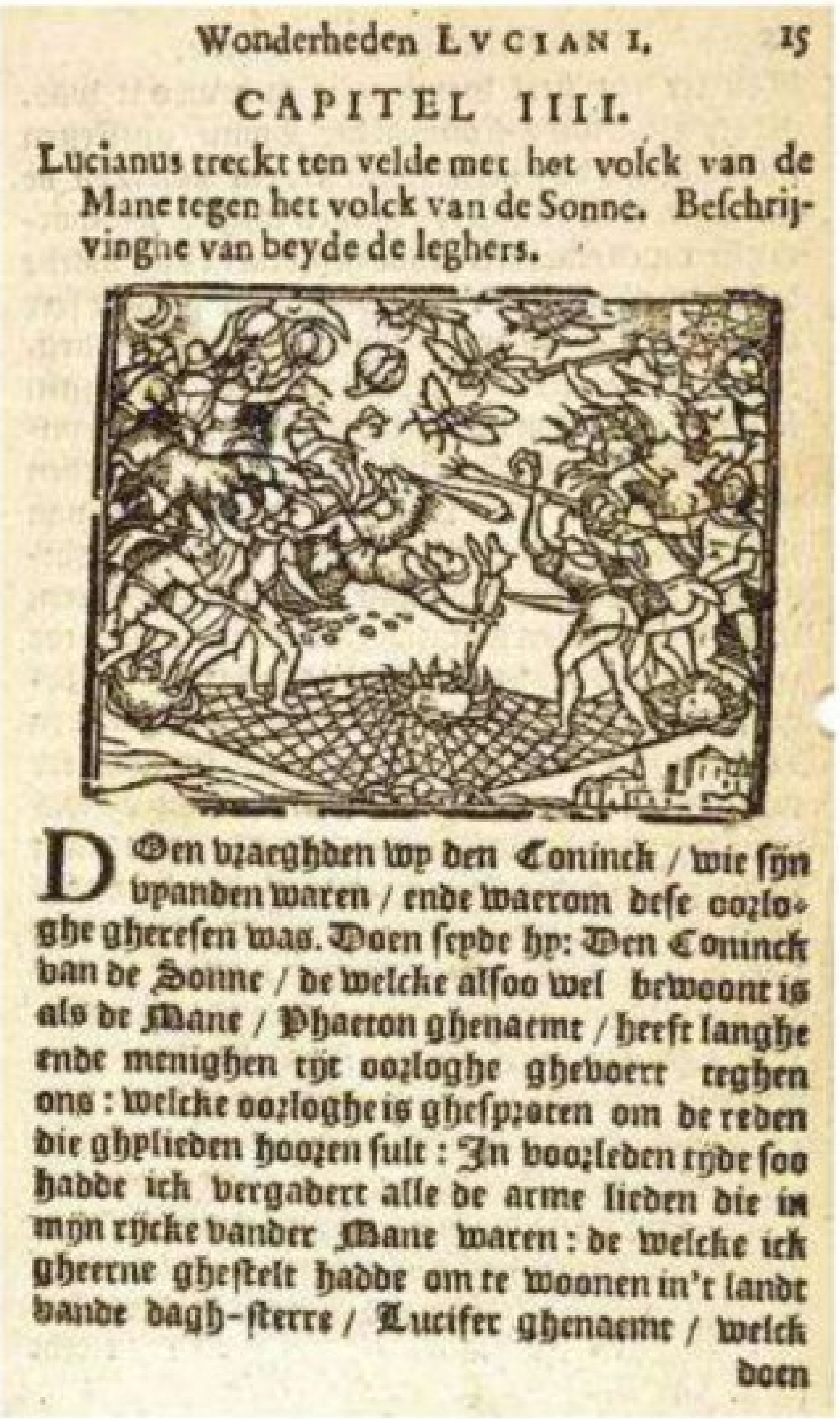
CLASSICAL FORTEANA

Many authors collected ancient forteana. These were significantly popular in Lucian's time. His Roman contemporary, Gellius, describes their diet of Scythian cannibals, Dog-Headed folk, One-Eyed Giants, Monopods, fast-running creatures with backward-turned feet, and the denizens of "remote Albania" whose hair turned white in childhood. Another stock-in-trade was multiple births of often Fellini-esque freaks and sex changes, usually women into men. Another contemporary, Phlegon, concentrated on these in his *Book Of Wonders*, along with women producing snakes, homosexuals having babies, and a 100-cubit (157ft / 48m) coffin with matching-size corpse that was 5,000 years old at death. Mythology and mirabilia co-existed with scientific theorising. Ancient astronomy was based on naked-eye observation. Telescopes were within Lucian's imagination, but he credits them to lunar, not terrestrial, technology. The ancients were confined to five planets (nothing beyond Saturn), a handful of stars, also comets and meteors, of which they were understandably afraid. Still, their minds were not so confined. Along with Herodorus and Philolaus, the pre-Socratic thinkers Anaxagoras (who posited panspermia), Democritus (of atomic theory fame), and Xenophanes speculated about the Moon. Some thought it inhabited; all envisaged giant lunar topography.

Pythagoras was more off-beat: though featuring in all histories of ancient science, he claimed previous existence in the Trojan War, conversations with demons, and a visit to Hades. In his poem *On The Nature Of Things*, the Roman Lucretius (1st century BC) accepted other worlds containing different life forms. A century later, Seneca mentions fellow-Stoics' belief that the Sun was also inhabited, a fantasy brought to literary life by Lucian (who would have savoured the joke about the Irish astronaut planning to visit the Sun – at night!) Aldiss and Amis miss all this, as they do Plutarch's essay *The Face In The Moon* (AD 72), which encapsulates ancient lunar theories; Kepler translated it just before his death. Plutarch waxes on lunar topography, also Aristotle's tentative belief in life there, adding "there is much talk on this, serious and frivolous," disdaining a tale that a man once fell from the Moon to Earth. He combines, as does Lucian, lunar topics with tales of a remote continent, thought by Kepler and others down to G Mair (1909) to be America. Another Lucian contemporary, the astronomer-geographer Ptolemy, poetically combines science and humanism:

I am merely mortal,
But when I see the stars,
I feel like an immortal,
With Jupiter and Mars.

Homer's *Odyssey* is familiar: the one-eyed giant Cyclops, cannibalistic monster Læstrygonians, 12-headed doglike Scylla (ridiculed by Lucretius), Circe's man-into-pig enchantments, and Odysseus's descent into Hades to converse via magical aids with the dead. This last motif would become regular in both serious and light literature: Virgil, Lucian, Timarion, Dante, down to Stan Lee's comic-book superheroes and the second *Bill and Ted* film. However, writers ignore the *Iliad*'s descriptions (Book 18) of self-propelling wheeled tables and "golden maidservants who resemble real girls, not only speaking and moving, but endowed with thought and trained in handiwork". These pre-Karel Čapek robots sound like the androids Captain Kirk was forever falling in lust with. True, they are invented by Hephæstus, god of technology: what counts is that the human Homer could visualise such things.



Wonderheden LVCIANI. 15

CAPITEL IIII.

Lucianus treckt ten velde met het volck van de Mane tegen het volck van de Sonne. Beſchrijvinghe van beyde de leghers.

DOen vraeghden wy den Coninck / wie ſyn vyanden waren / ende waerom deſe oorloghe ghereſen was. Doen ſeyde hy: Den Coninck van de Sonne / de welcke alſoo wel bewoont is als de Mane / Phaeton ghenaemt / heeft langhe ende menighen tyt oorloghe ghevoert teghen ons: welcke oorloghe is gheſproten om de reden die ghy lieden hooren ſult: In voorleden tyde ſoo hadde ick vergadert alle de arme lieden die in myn rycke vander Mane waren: de welcke ick gheerne gheſtelt hadde om te woonen in't landt vande dagh-ſterre / Lucifer ghenaemt / welck doen

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ABOVE: Lucian's *True History*, in a Dutch edition of 1647. **BELOW**: The Cyclops, Ray Harryhausen style, in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1958).

GETTY IMAGES / ARCHIVE PHOTOS / COLUMBIA PICTURES

Three Aristophanes plays (5th c. BC) offer comic science fiction, a genre extending via Lucian and Timarion through Rabelais and Swift down to *Hitch-Hiker's Guide* and *Red Dwarf*. In *Peace*, a war-weary citizen flies to Heaven on a giant dung beetle to bring her down. *Birds* has two Athenian drop-outs establishing their utopian Cloud Cuckoo Land. In *Frogs*, Dionysus descends to Hades to fetch back the best dead poet to Earth. Plato's Atlantis story may be a cautionary tale to unite Sicilian Greeks against Carthaginian invasion. His Atlanteans do not have lasers, as in their woeful Steve Reeves cinematic incarnation; but the herds of elephants on this remote northern island are no less surprising. For building and cognate technology, much is made of a mysterious metal, "orichalcum", described as "more precious than everything save gold, nowadays only a name". Plato's Er tells how his soul left his body and travelled to Hades where he saw the infernal sights before returning to life. His economic mode of travel suggests Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter, who simply gazes up at Mars and finds himself on its surface after a brief interplanetary commute.

Plato's Bellowing Chasm prefigures the booming Time-Portal in *Star Trek*'s "City On The Edge Of Forever". Theopompus, Plato's contemporary, included in his (fragmentary) historical works a sea serpent attacking ships and the advent of a satyr. He also developed a full-blown utopia beyond the ocean where two cities, Eusebes (Pious) and Machimos (Warlike) have lifestyles un-Greek and unlike each other. Machimos doesn't invade Eusebes; it once invaded the Hyperboreans (a much-mentioned Greek fantasy race) but withdrew on learning they were the happiest people on Earth. Compare Wells's gentle Eloi and savage Morlocks, also the three contiguous rival societies of Robert Heinlein's "Coventry". Theopompus also conceived Anostos (*Place Of No Return*) in Africa, where trees by the Rivers of Grief and Pleasure bore fruit that caused its eaters to transmogrify into weeping babies and dissolve. Another contemporary, Ctesias, was anciently celebrated for his *India*, a book crammed with monsters, giants, pygmies, dog-headed men, wondrous minerals, and bizarre sexual practices. Ctesias is one of two authors invoked by Lucian; the other, a merchant-writer Iambulus (date uncertain), described a utopian island whose inhabitants' split tongues permit simultaneous conversations and whose tortoises' blood serves to re-attach severed limbs.

In first-century Rome, the novelist Petronius included werewolves and witches in his *Satyricon*. Belief in werewolves is ridiculed by the Elder Pliny as typical Greek nonsense – Herodotus had long ago publicised the lycanthrope Neuri tribe. Pliny the Younger offers serious accounts of haunted houses and chain-clanking ghosts; so does his friend, the historian Tacitus. The Byzantine Psellus (11th c.) describes the repertoire of a father-and-son magician team in Lucian's day: necromancy and saving a Roman army by contriving a humanoid clay figure which fired "unstoppable shots" at the enemy. Antonius Diogenes (date uncertain) penned a voluminous novel *Wonders Beyond Thule*. The surviving fragments have various adventurers, including a woman, Derkyllis (not Xena!). A female protagonist is unusual, but Derkyllis is more than a wimpy companion as in *Doctor Who*: her lone exploits include Hades. Antonius dedicated the novel to his sister, while Ptolemy Chennus consecrated his book of wonders to his "Learned Mistress". This all tempers Amis's contention that women do not go in much for science fiction. The men visit both Sun and Moon, the latter briefly compared to "a bare earth".

LUCIAN'S LUNAR VOYAGE

In the spirit of "To Boldly Go…", Lucian sails with 50 comrades to explore the mysterious ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules. An immediate storm drops them on an island after 79 buffeting days where giant footsteps and a plaque attest that Hercules and Dio-

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ABOVE: An undersea adventure for Alexander, in a 17th-century version of *The Alexander Romance*.

nysus got that far. Temptations include a wine river and the Vine Women – Wells adapted these for his *Flowering Of The Strange Orchid* – whose kisses are sweet; but two sailors who assault them are trapped by their erect penises which take root. The others re-embark, only to be flung high by a whirlwind and higher by a sail-bellying gale. After seven aerial days, they land on the great shining Moon. Hardly have they taken this giant step for ancient mankind when they are hauled off by tri-headed vulture police to their leader, Endymion. This amiable alien enlists our heroes in his war against the Sun King and his Ant-Dragons, the prize being the Morning Star. Both sides muster armies of allies from the Great Bear and other stars such as Grass Plume-Riders, Flea-Archers, Sky-Mosquitoes, and Giant Spiders who spin a Tholian-like web between Moon and Venus. The obligatory fights of Japanese movie monsters are already in place. The Sun army prevails, Endymion sues for peace, and a treaty is made dividing up the Universe between them.

Lucian now has leisure for lunar sociology. Moonites are all male: lunar man is born of man. Lacking genitals and anuses, they have no lavatorial functions. Sexual intercourse is achieved through the knee's hollow by dint of artificial organs – the first cyborg prosthetics – made of ivory or wood. Old Moonites don't die, they simply dissolve into the æther, like *Star Trek*'s Apollo. They sweat milk, their nasal drip is honey, their eyes are removable. Such attributes put George Lucas's creatures, also the gallimaufrey (apts, banths, siths) of Burroughs's Mars, quite in the shade. Leaving the Moon, they observe solar habitations, re-provision on Venus, pass by Cloud Cuckoo Land, and visit Lychnopolis (Lamp City) before re-entry into the ocean where they are promptly engulfed by a 250-mile (400km)-long whale, in whose belly dwell entire cities of fellow-swallowees. After two years of incarceration, they torch the monster's innards and escape. They next encounter a frozen ocean, Cheese Island, and aquaplaning Cork Men before entering Hades where the heroes and villains of mythology are witnessed, plus a *Bill and Ted*-style interview with Homer to determine if he actually wrote the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. After leaving here, they variously elude the Pumpkin-Pirates, a gigantic kingfisher resembling Sindbad's Roc, and the Ass-Leg Cannibal Women (shades of the 1959 classic, *Leech Woman*) before reaching their original transatlantic destination. What happens next, Lucian does not tell. The last sentence promises a sequel, never written – the 17th-century Spaniard Francisco Reguera remedies this in a still unpublished continuation. Maybe George Lucas should have heeded Lucian and quit while ahead. In Lucian's other science fiction, Icaro Menippus flies to Heaven seeking both cosmology and human moral perspective. The *Nekyomanteia* finds the same hero in Hades looking for a code of living: satire against philosophers and the rich adorns the usual mythological fun. Two other dialogues (*Descent* and *Charon*) have similar settings and themes. In *The Lover Of Lies*, Lucian, like a modern tabloid, eats his cake and has it, ridiculing tall tales of exorcisms, poltergeists and people who "die" and return with revelations from "the other side" by spinning out countless such dossiers.

The Alexander Romance (unknown author and date) was antiquity's "best-selling novel": 80 versions in 24 languages rival the Bible's diffusion. One segment comprises Alexander's adventures at the world's end, very similar to earlier stories. We note its Plant-Men – 24 cubits (38ft / 11.5m) tall, two-cubit (3ft 2in / 1m) neck-span, belligerent killers with saw-like arms and hands – for comparison with Burroughs's Plant-Men in *Gods Of Mars*: 12ft (3.7m) tall, large feet, razor-like talons. Two anonymous Byzantine fictions, *Timarion* (12th c) and *Mazaris* (15th c), involve trips to Hades. The former's plot, a man taken before his time, anticipates *Heaven Can Wait*. Timarion is snatched from his sickbed by two black-robed demons who whirl him through the air and down a dark pit to iron-gated Hell, whence after winning permission to continue living he re-enters his body via nose and mouth. The setting is a pagan-Christian jumble: Cerberus and Minos sharing judgement with a Byzantine emperor, much bright white light, infernal punishments such as Nero forever shovelling excrement. The Mazaris uses the underworld setting for its hero to settle old scores with pre-deceased enemies.

There is much Lucian in these novelettes, as in another anonymous Byzantine dialogue in Hades between Charon, Hermes, and the just-arrived Alexander the Great. One Byzantine also paved the way for modern sword-and-sorcery fantasy, with a dash of soft porn, in the rare shape of a verse novel, *Callimachus And Chrysorrhoe* (14th c), where hero finds heroine hanging naked by her hair from the battlement of a magic castle of an ogre-dragon whom he kills after an improbable pole-vault over the walls. The finale has him ravish her after bathing together, both acts in defiance of Byzantine morality. Carnality apart, this unexpectedly anticipates John Carter and Deja Thoris in Burroughs's Martian chronicles.

Quipped Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest: "SF's no good," they bellow till we're deaf. "But this looks good" – "Well, then, it's not SF."

Lucian began the *True History* with a cod debate on what's good and fun in literature, and in Hades commissioned this couplet from Homer: "One Lucian, whom the blessed gods befriend, Observed what's here, and back home did wend." **FT**

FURTHER READING

Brian Aldiss: *Billion Year Spree: The True History Of Science Fiction*, 1973, repr. as *Trillion Year Spree* in 1986.

Kingsley Amis: *New Maps Of Hell*, 1960.

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SC Fredericks: "Lucian's True History As Science Fiction", *Science Fiction Studies 3*, pp49–60, 1976.

Roger L Green: *Into Other Worlds: Space-Flight In Fiction From Lucian To Lewis*, 1957.

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Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers*, 1959.

JV Luce: *The End Of Atlantis*, 1969.

James S Romm: *The Edges Of The Earth In Ancient Thought*, 1992.

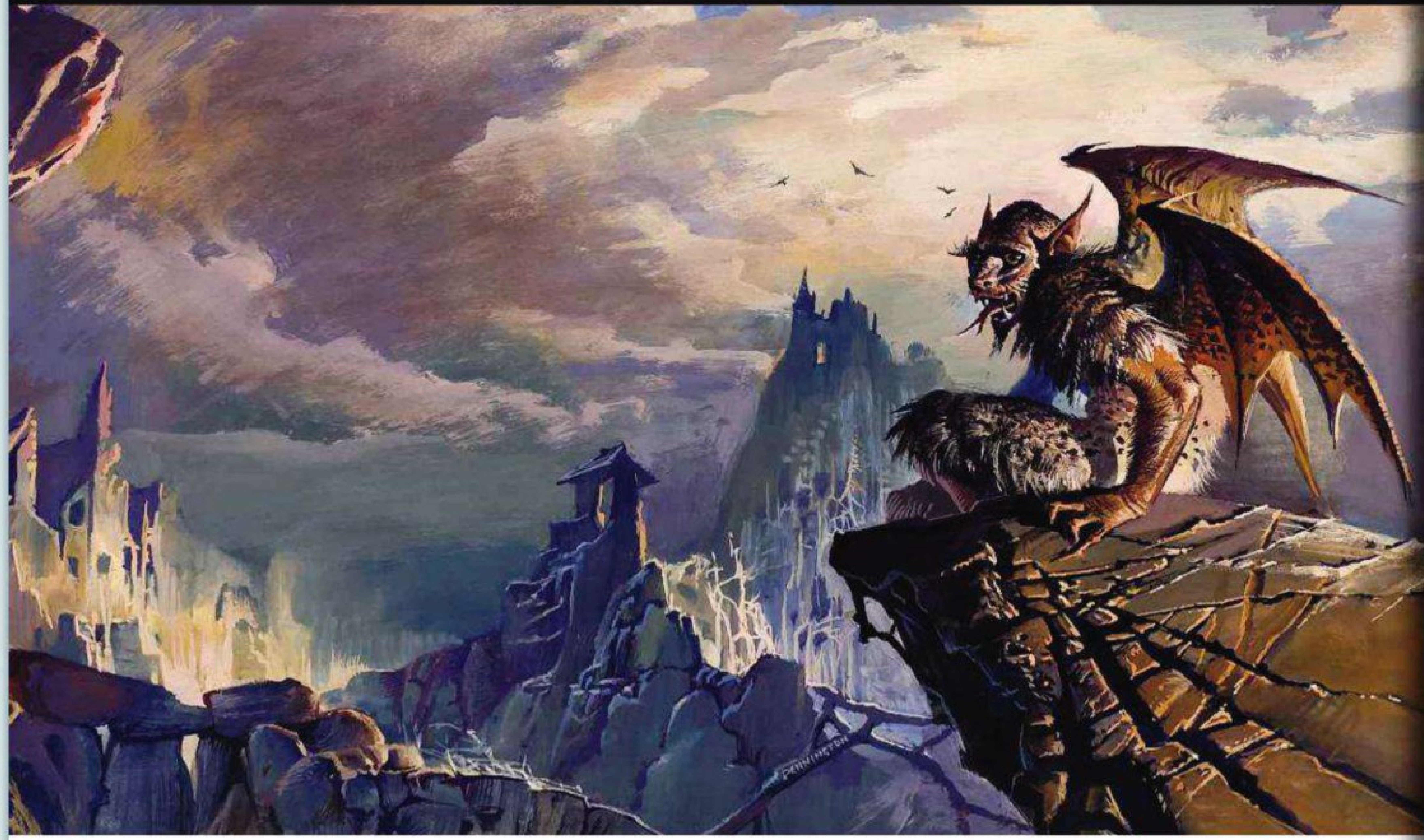
Roy A Swanson: "The True, The False, and The Truly False: Lucian's Philosophical Science Fiction", *Science Fiction Studies 6*, 1979, pp228–39.

Annotated English translations of Antonius Diogenes, Lucian, and *The Alexander Romance* are most conveniently found in Bryan P Reardon (ed.): *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 1989.

Timarion is translated with full commentary by Barry Baldwin (1984); *Mazaris* by A Smithies (1975), Kepler's *Somnium* by Edward Rosen (1967).

NOTE

[1] This is Kepler's term for "the Moon's Earth". He also has the analogous terms 'Subvolva' – the Earth-facing side of the Moon and 'Privola' – the far side of the Moon. They are found in "The Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy of Johannes Kepler, Late Imperial Mathematician".



ABOVE: Cover art for Clark Ashton Smith's *The Abominations of Yondo*, 1974.
BELOW: Pennington's first SF cover commission – Robert Heinlein's *Stranger In A Strange Land*.

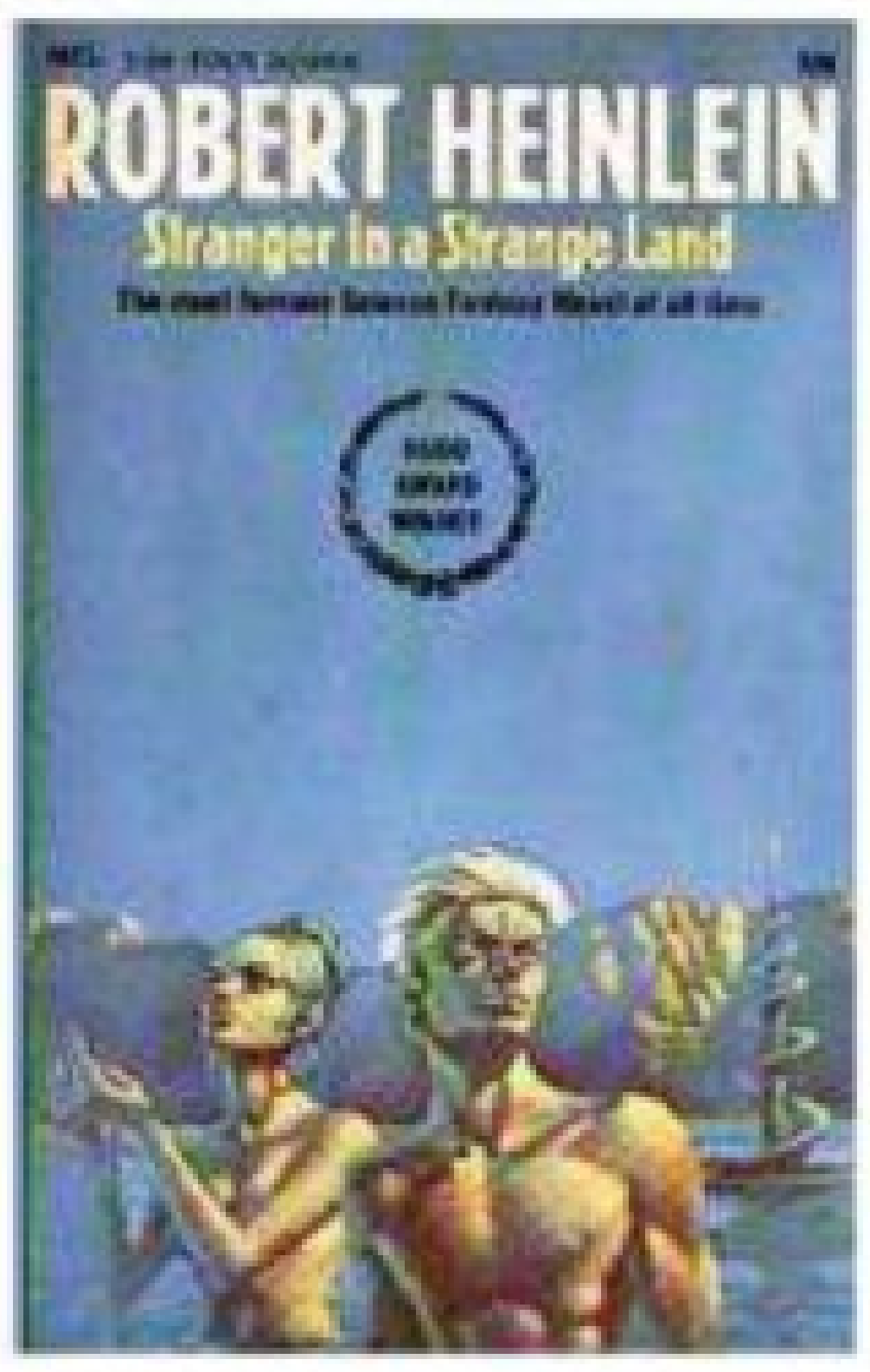
STRANGE LANDS: THE ART OF BRUCE PENNINGTON

Science fiction has always been reliant on striking visuals to get its message across, and never more so than in the golden age of British SF paperback design that began in the late 1960s. **DAVID V BARRETT** meets legendary cover artist Bruce Pennington.

Anyone with a collection of science fiction paperbacks from the 1970s will know Bruce Pennington's artwork. It graced the covers of books by Brian Aldiss, Clifford D Simak, Ray Bradbury, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Clark Ashton Smith, AE van Vogt, M John Harrison, Christopher Priest and many more.

Most famously, the stunning covers of Frank Herbert's first three *Dune* books, with the robed, blue-eyed Fremen and the ornithopter in the background, were his work – as was Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight*. When I looked at his website, showing dozens of covers, I found I had nearly all of them on my shelves. They're stunning, gorgeously coloured pieces of art, even at paperback size.

Pennington won the Best Artist award from the British Science Fiction Association in 1981 and 1983, and was nominated for it in 1982 and 1984. Paper Tiger published three collections of his work, *The Bruce Pennington Portfolio* in 1990, *Ultraterranium*, mostly previously unpublished work, in 1991 and a miniature book in 1994. In 2008 he illustrated Nigel Suckling's *The Book of the Vampire*. Now he is having – remarkably – the first-ever exhibition of his original artwork. The exhibition, at the Atlantis Bookshop in London, will run from 29 July to 27 August. I met up with him at Atlantis in early June.



Pennington's first SF cover was the New English Library (NEL) paperback of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* – one of the most iconic books of the 60s/70s, from which a religion, the Church of All Worlds, was to spring. What a book to get as his first cover commission, I say.

"I know. It was incredible timing. 1967 was the big year of the Sixties anyway. There were so many weird things happening; it was not just the Summer of Love – I call it the ethereal autumn of UFOs flying over. There was so much interest in ufology at that time, the UFO Club and everything. It was just a wonderful time to walk into their studios."

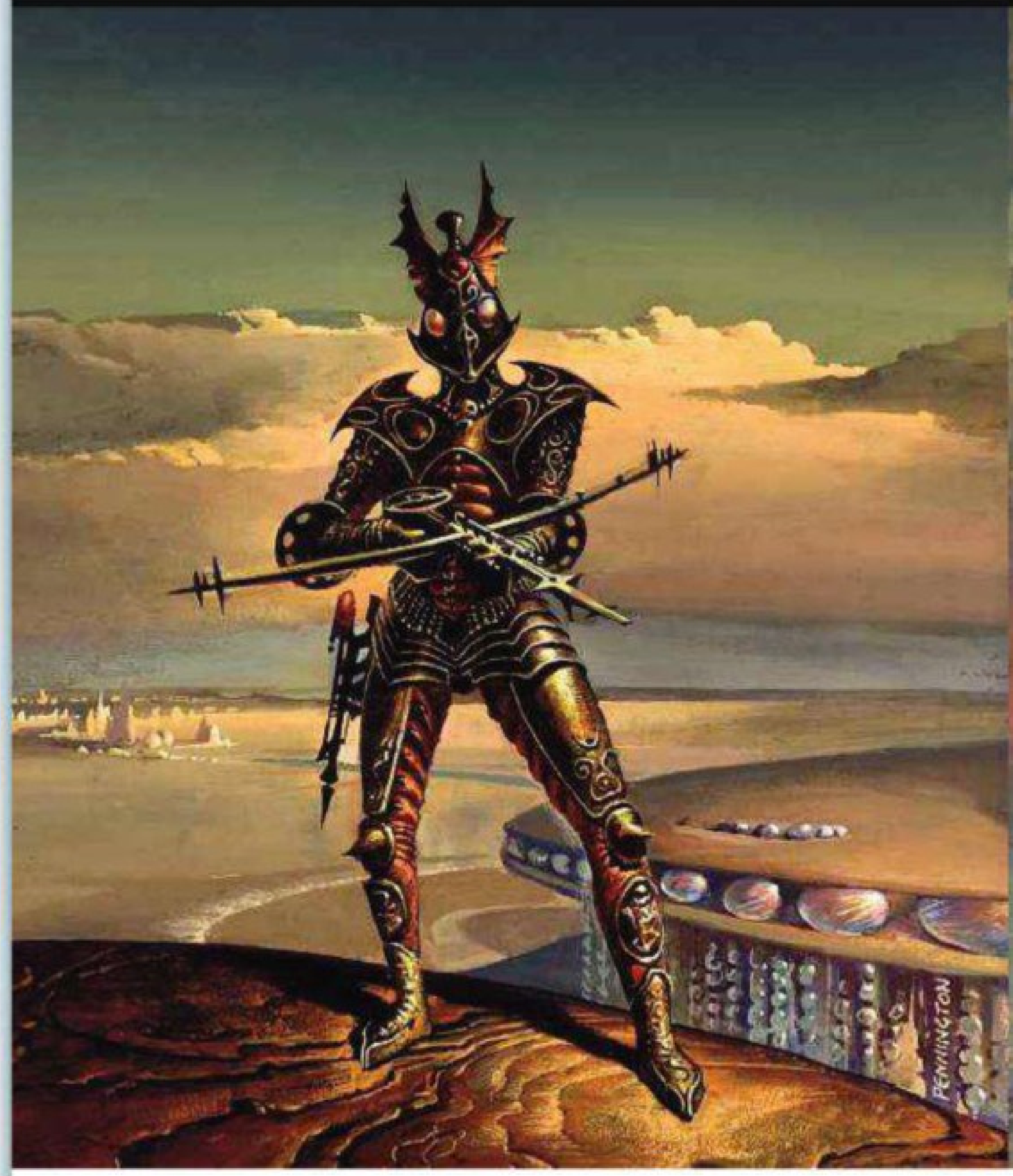
Born in 1944, Bruce Pennington began going to life drawing classes in Beckenham, south London, in 1960 when he was 16 and still at school. "I was just hooked," he says. "The atmosphere of freedom, the smell of turpentine and Gauloise cigarettes. They had the highest number of entries into the Royal College of Art anywhere. That was pretty good in itself. And I met interesting people; it was a cosmopolitan atmosphere."

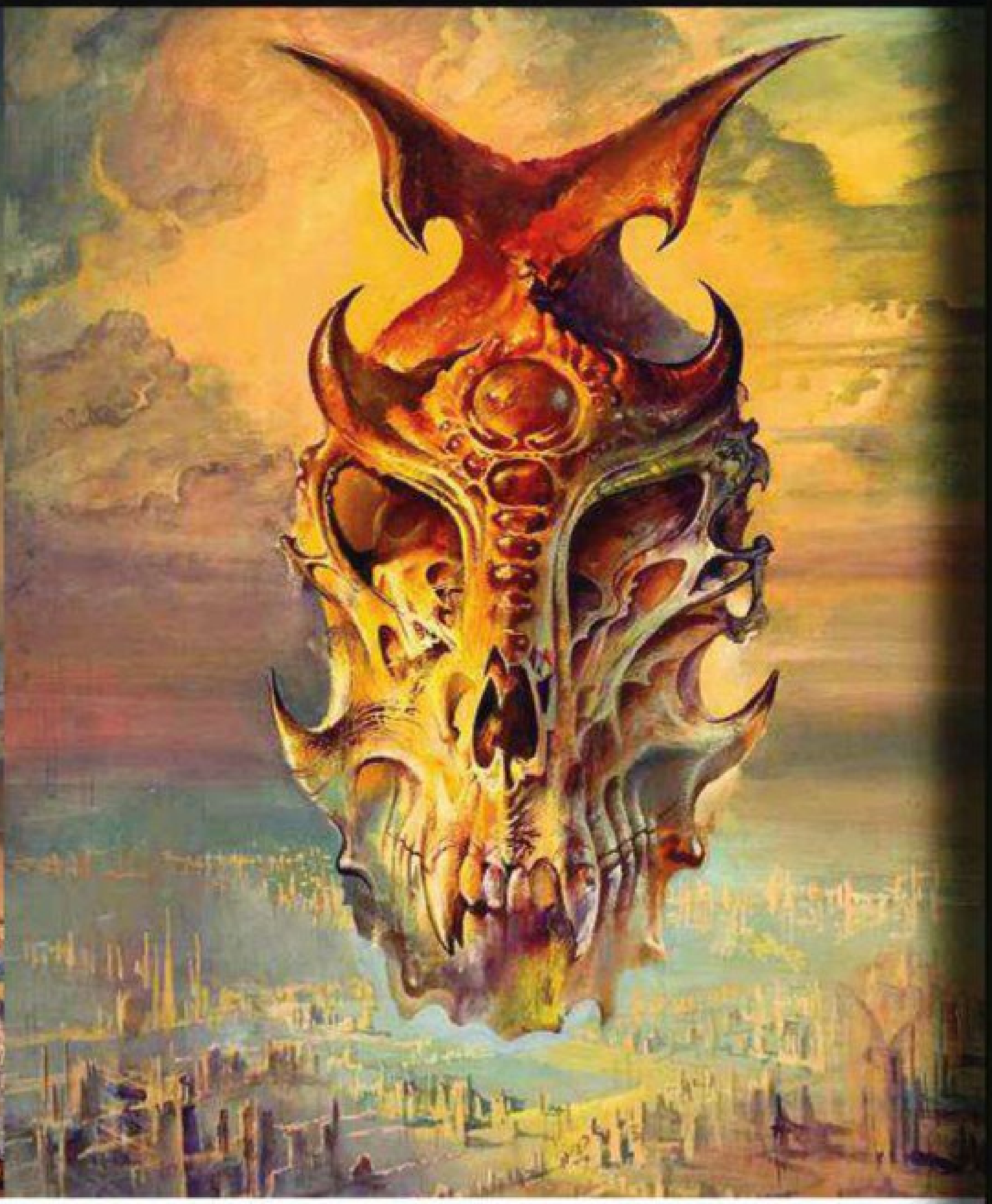
There's a remarkable use of colour in his paintings, particularly a startling deep pink and a vibrant green which he discovered as early as 1964, and describes as "perversely beautiful". "Colour itself first made an impact on me when I was at art school," he says. One teacher particularly inspired him: "It's odd how some people can infect you with something, just by their sheer enthusiasm; the way he spoke about colour, especially the French impressionists, almost devotionally, and I would just sit engrossed by the way he spoke about them, and I thought I must try to please this teacher, because he's putting so much into this, and it all came out in my work. Suddenly – this was in 1961 – it all just happened. It was a lovely, thrilling feeling, to suddenly realise that colour had a meaning all of its own, and I just focused on it continually after that."

After four years at art colleges in Beckenham and Bromley, he worked for a commercial agency for a couple of years producing film posters; then he went freelance, and in 1967 started being commissioned to do book covers.

Pennington's influences include Bosch, Goya, Fuseli, John Martin and Blake.

"They were no-holds-barred. Goya just did what he wanted, he opened up his subconscious – those wonderful pictures of flying people – and Bosch of course was the same; he wasn't held back by the Church, he was just like a madman, doing exactly what he wanted. And people loved him for it; they didn't try to censor him. Fuseli as well; he was a bit like Richard Dadd, the so-called 'mad artist' – they were all very much like that. They inspired me with the idea that you can do what you like. Then it was kick-started again when I saw Hans Rudi Giger's work (see **FT271:30–35**) – the



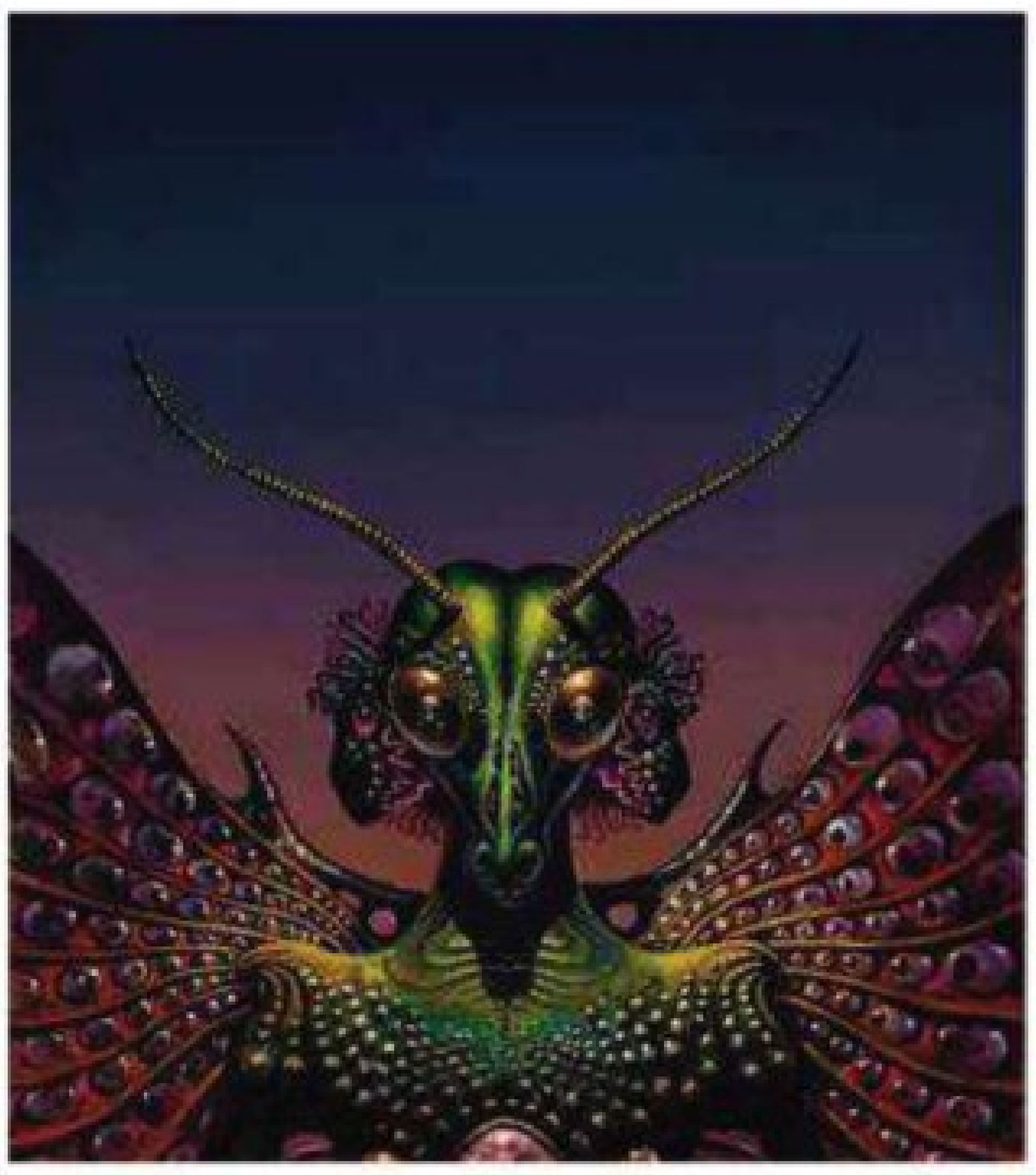


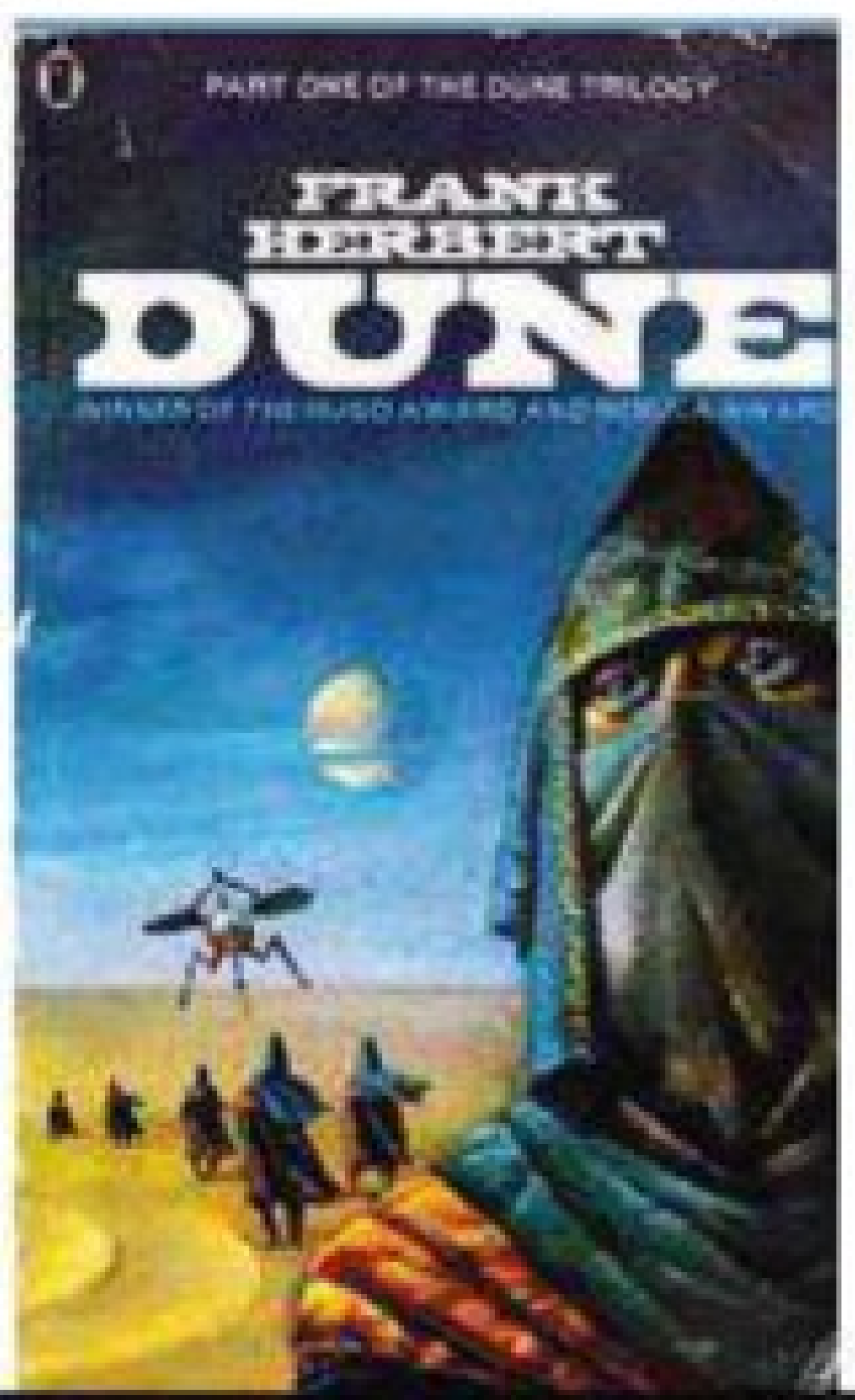
ABOVE LEFT: Cover art for Robert Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon*, 1974. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Nordius*, unpublished original artwork. **BELOW:** Cover art for the SF anthology *Bug-Eyed Monsters*, ed. Anthony Chetham, 1974. **BOTTOM:** Cover art for Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

Alien designer – it was like a fresh reinvention of Goya and Fuseli again."

There are quite a lot of skulls in his paintings, I point out. He traces this back to a disturbing incident in his childhood when he saw a horror comic with a living skeleton. "Up till then I was a real little dream kid; I used to like books on elves and fairies, and the world was a good place." Then he saw the comic. "It was a creature that went around at night in a coffin coach. It did the most terrible things to people; it wrenched them inside. I couldn't read it; it was just too terrifying, the concept that something like that could exist. Its face was like a skull. That's what started it off: I had to somehow have power over this thing. I thought, if I can draw it, then somehow I've got control over it."

His cover art, especially Gene Wolfe's "Book of the New Sun" series, often includes distressed architecture, like partly ruinous Greek or Roman temples. He mentions Clark Ashton Smith, "the decadence of the whole thing crumbling", and the architecture of the Cthulhu mythos: "It's slightly disturbing, it didn't follow a normal perspective." When I suggest the lost city of Petra carved into the rock he becomes excited: "That's it! Absolutely! That's what I love about some sculptors like Rodin and Michelangelo: they would chisel out half of a human body and leave the rest in the rock, and it looked as though it was breaking out of the rock."




PART ONE OF THE DUNE TRILOGY
FRANK HERBERT
DUNE

In 1977 he published *Eschatus*, a book about the End Time, based on Nostradamus and the Book of Revelation. "I was very fascinated by Catholic iconography, miracles, the supernatural; there's so much in the Catholic Church that is miraculous, whether it's good or bad I don't know." A long-time *Fortean Times* reader, he mentions the article about Lourdes which said there was a tradition of visions of a White Lady in the Pyrenees before Bernadette saw her in 1848 and she was identified as the Virgin Mary (see **FT222:32–38**). "It's amazing how everything is absorbed by the Catholic Church and used for its own purposes," he says.

There's a lot of religious imagery in his paintings. Pennington comments on a 1973 painting, *Impossible Possibilities*, "an angel on a spire with flying saucers coming in in echelons over a deserted city", which could have come straight out of the Russell T Davies / Steven Moffat *Doctor Who*. "That's the sort of thing I was really into at that time. It was a very troubling time around then, the early Seventies – it was almost like that Barry McGuire song 'Eve of Destruction'." A later work, *Laghima*, shows a luxuriantly dressed female figure, haloed by a full moon, floating above a lake, surrounded by candles – a stunning variant on the BVM as Stella Maris. His cover for Walter M Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* fittingly combines images of monks with ruined architecture.

Bruce Pennington's paintings illustrated my student days – not just the paperbacks, but all the poster-sized reproductions in the fondly remembered *Science Fiction Monthly*, a showcase for NEL covers. Just before I met him, I realised that he might also bear some responsibility for my own writing career. He painted the paperback cover of one of the books which sparked my interest in new and esoteric religions, Dr Christopher Evans's *Cults of Unreason*: a psychedelically-coloured flying saucer hovering over a group of people, some in robes, on a mountaintop. It could be the Raelians, the Aetherius Society, Unarius, Heaven's Gate. "I thought, why ridicule it when you can make it into something startling?" says Pennington. "Who are these guys in this Assyrian sort of make-up, with the robes and everything; this weird thing – is it real or is it imagined?" he asks. It could almost be *Dune*.

Website: www.brucepennington.co.uk/
The exhibition runs 29 July – 27 August at the Atlantis Bookshop, 49a Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY.
All images courtesy of Atlantis Bookshop www.theatlantisbookshop.com/

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 40: MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES

This is a vexed subject for forteans, in the sense that the anomalous aspects of classic cases of 'mysterious' disappearances have a tendency themselves to evaporate on close inspection. For example: the 'woo' end of paranormality's fandom may still talk in hushed tones of the Bermuda Triangle, but Larry Kusche comprehensively trashed the myth as long ago as 1975, in *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved* (Prometheus), while the maritime insurers Lloyds of London and the US Coastguard insist that there is nothing statistically unusual about losses of ships, aircraft or people in the area. We observe in passing that memories are often short – in both length and content – in this field, and this allows the sensationalist and the unscrupulous to recycle long-solved 'mysteries' almost *ad infinitum*.

The best lesson of the Bermuda Triangle is perhaps this: that while disappearances of various kinds may remain unexplained, they don't necessarily, let alone automatically, involve anything anomalistic. The loss of the British South American Airways airliner *Star Dust* over the Andes, on 2 August 1947, is a case in point. The aircraft crashed into the Tupungato glacier at about 15,500ft (4,700m) above sea level: navigating by dead reckoning, the crew were probably misled into thinking they were much further west, and began a descent toward Santiago, Chile. The wreckage took 50 years to emerge as it crept down the mountain encased in ice. The one mystery that remains is *Star Dust*'s last Morse code message: STENDEC. No one knows – or admits to knowing – what this was supposed to mean. Among the passengers were a British King's Messenger carrying diplomatic documents, a German *émigré* suspected of Nazi sympathies, and a rich Palestinian, who was reportedly carrying a large diamond hidden in the lining of his jacket. Rich pickings for conspiracy theorists or an enterprising novelist, then, but precious little for anomalists.

THE PERVERSITY OF CHARLES FORT

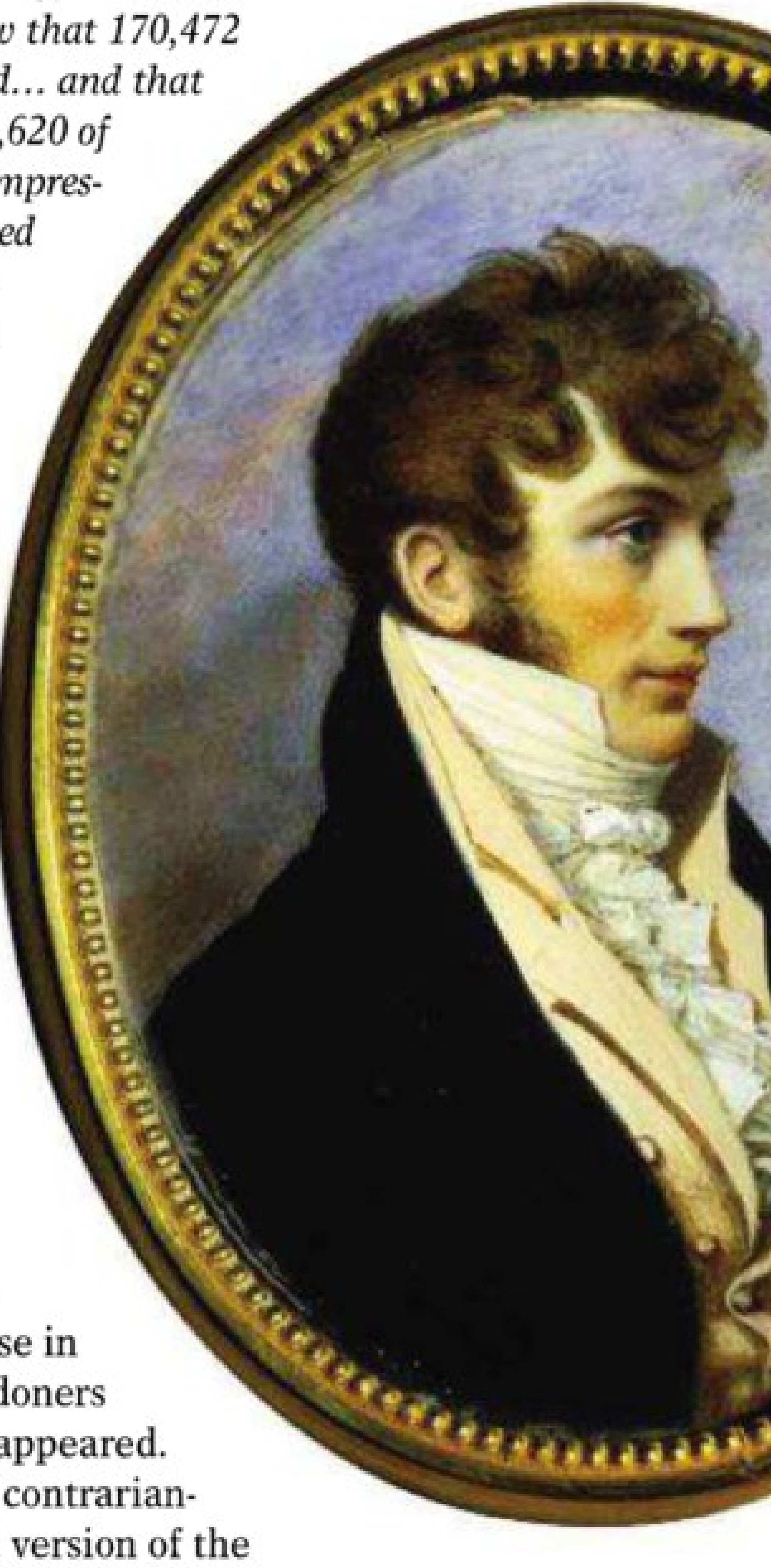
Disappearing people need to be set in context, besides. Nearly 2,300 people are reported as missing every day in the United States. Most of them turn up sooner or later. During 2005, the US National Crime Information Center had received 834,536 reports of missing persons, but in the course of the year they had also cleared 844,838 cases. Over 109,500 files remained open, of which 53 per cent listed children and young people under 18, and another 11 per cent young adults under 20. Going missing is slightly more popular in the UK, where 600 people vanish, if only temporarily, every day. About six of those, or about 2,200 annually, remain unfound. Of adults who are found, some 40 per cent choose not to contact those searching for them. This suggests that of those who aren't found, those that haven't been murdered, abducted or died by suicide or in undiscovered accidents, probably want to stay out of reach of their former associates. They may have any number of motives, rational or otherwise, for remaking their lives.

CRYPTIC MESSENGER: The *Star Dust*, which disappeared in August 1947 and took 50 years to re-emerge from the mountain glacier.

Overall, that today over 2,000 people go permanently missing each year in the UK may seem a large *number*, but it's less than four people per 100,000 of the population. Someone, somewhere, is no doubt convinced that these people have been stolen by fairies, hoovered up by aliens or are populating a secret base on Mars; but we note no pressing reason or cogent evidence to support such fancies. We wonder rather whether hypotheses of this sort are simply the extreme version of a general reason for insisting on seeing something mysterious behind these disappearances. We seem to hanker for an elaborate cause of a phenomenon that, strictly speaking, needs no explanation – and for exactly that reason is irksome. Simplicity just isn't that sexy.

This propensity to elaborate and complicate needlessly is well-exemplified by Charles Fort's treatment of missing-person figures for London from 1907 to 1913 (see *Lo!*, John Brown 1996, p136):

> *"In the* Literary Digest *(46, 922), it is said that the police records of London show that 170,472 persons mysteriously disappeared… and that nothing had been found out in 3,620 of the cases. Anybody who has an impression of 167,212 cases, all explained ordinarily, may not think much of 3,260 cases left over. But some of us, now educated somewhat, or at least temporarily, by experience of pseudo-endings of mysteries, will question that the 167,212 cases were so satisfactorily explained, except relatively to not very exacting satisfactions."*



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Those 'unsolved' cases represent about 1.9 per cent of the total: in other words, a century ago twice the percentage of persons reported missing stayed 'missing'. This is hardly surprising for an age less blighted by bureaucratic oppressions and paranoia: it was a lot easier then to take a new name and fade from official view. Considering which, Fort is perverse in suggesting that 167,000-plus Londoners may also have "mysteriously" disappeared.

Fort (*loc. cit.*) precedes his idle contrarianism here with a highly condensed version of the notorious 'mysterious' disappearance in Perleberg, Prussia, of British diplomat Benjamin Bathurst (above) on 25 November 1809. Bathurst was famously described in *Historical Oddities* (London, 1889) by the Rev. S Baring-Gould as being "outside the [White Swan] inn watching his portmanteau, which had been taken within, being replaced on the carriage", when he "stepped around to the heads of the horses – *and was never seen again*". This sentence – the italics are in the original – implies a sudden, inexplicable vanishment, and is partly responsible for Bathurst becoming a fortean icon of abrupt absenteeism.

Fort himself – and his many successors – might have done well to dwell on this, from Baring-Gould's next paragraph: "Darkness had closed in before 5pm, as the sun set at four… The landlord was at the doorway talking to the secretary, who, as courier, was paying the account. No-one particularly observed the movements of Mr Bathurst at the moment." Fort preferred to monger a mystery in his own cause and, it appears, deliberately ignored the implication that Bathurst's absence caused no immediate alarm, or even astonishment. Bathurst's sister, the splendidly named Mrs Tryphena Thistlethwayte, confirmed this in a memoir: "After waiting for him for nearly an hour, his attendants began to make enquiries for him."[1]

The best guesses are that Bathurst was either snatched by hoodlums, robbed and murdered, or was lifted by French agents. He made no secret of carrying "a considerable sum of money", according to his manservant, and there was no shortage of miscreants in Perleberg. Bathurst himself was in fear of being grabbed by the French: he was travelling in the guise of a German merchant under the name of Baron de Koch. In April 1809, he had persuaded Emperor Francis of Austria to declare war on France; that had resulted in the loss of Vienna and defeat at the battle of Wagram in July, and Bathurst was possibly on his way to try to prevent a complete Austrian capitulation when hastening home became the more prudent move. There were scraps of rumour and hearsay that supported the theory that French soldiers had kidnapped him in Perleberg, but the French government (some say Napoleon himself) denied any part in Bathurst's disappearance and, indeed, offered to help find him.

Meanwhile, the Perleberg authorities ordered a search of the area, which turned up Bathurst's expensive fur coat on 27 November and then, on 16 December, two old ladies found his pantaloons – sporting two bullet holes, but no bloodstains – in a nearby wood. Neither of these facts exactly support a paranormal interpretation of Bathurst's disappearance. In 1852, the skeleton of a man whose skull had been bashed in was unearthed in a house whose former owner had been working at the White Swan in 1809. Mrs Thistlethwayte happened to be in Perleberg at the time, but did not recognise the skull as her brother's.

So, yes, the disappearance of Benjamin Bathurst remains a mystery – but a murder mystery, not some profound enigma of anomalistics. Fort should have heeded his own dictum (*op. cit.* p155): "I think not of a widening of truth, but of a lessening of errors."

GUNS THAT DON'T SMOKE

If an ambiguous sentence in Baring-Gould's *Historical Oddities* was the trigger for a modern legend, Fort's was the finger that pulled it. A similar mechanism was at work in creating the legend of the "vanished battalion" – the claim that the best part of 1/5 Bn The Norfolk Regiment disappeared without trace when a strange cloud descended on them in the midst of a battle in Gallipoli on 12 August 1915.

The trigger was this passage from the Allied Mediterranean Expeditionary Force's commanding general Sir Ian Hamilton's despatch of 11 December 1915, describing the battle:

> *"In the course of the fight, creditable in all respects to the 163rd Brigade, there happened a very mysterious thing. The 1/5th. Norfolk were on the right of the line and found themselves for a moment less strongly opposed than the rest of the brigade. Against the yielding forces of the enemy Colonel Sir H Beauchamp, a bold, self-confident officer, eagerly pressed forward, followed by the best part of the battalion. The fighting grew hotter… But the Colonel, with 16 officers and 250 men, still kept pushing on, driving the enemy before them. Among these ardent souls was part of a fine company enlisted from the King's Sandringham estates. Nothing more was ever seen or heard of any of them. They charged into the forest and were lost to sight or sound. Not one of them ever came back."*

The operation that afternoon was intended to rid an area named Kuchuk Anafarta Ova of snipers, clearing the way for an

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READY FOR ACTION: British troops land at Suvla on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, before the August 1915 offensive.

assault in division strength on two Turkish-held hills the following day. The 163rd Brigade consisted of 1/5 Bn Suffolk Regiment on the left flank of the attack, 1/8 Bn Hampshire Regiment in the centre, and the 1/5 Bn Norfolks on the right. In the rear was 1/4 Bn of the Norfolks. It sounded straightforward, but the ground was unreconnoitred, enemy strength there was unknown, and troops were issued the wrong maps. The disaster that followed effectively wrecked any hope of a successful ground campaign in Gallipoli.

Fifty years later, Gallipoli veterans Frederick Reichardt, R Newnes and JL Newman pulled Hamilton's trigger with a document riddled with any number of inaccuracies – chief among them, that 1/4 Bn Norfolks 'vanished', on 21 August. Their main claim, however, still does the rounds, unflagging and unwearied by time:

> *"The day broke clear, without a cloud in sight… The exception, however, was a number of perhaps six or eight 'loaf of bread' shaped clouds – all shaped exactly alike – which were hovering over Hill 60… [T]hese clouds did not alter their position in any shape or form, nor did they drift away under the influence of the breeze… Also stationary and resting on the ground right underneath this group of clouds was a similar cloud in shape, measuring about 800 feet [245m] in length, 220 feet [67m] in height, and 200 feet [61m] in width. This… was absolutely dense, solid-looking in structure…*
>
> *A British regiment [sic], the First-Fourth Norfolk… was then noticed marching up [a] sunken road towards Hill 60. However, when they arrived at this cloud, they marched straight into it, with no hesitation, but no one ever came out to deploy and fight at Hill 60. About an hour later… this cloud very unobtrusively lifted off the ground and… rose slowly until it joined the other similar clouds… [Then] they all moved away northwards…"*

Reichardt & Co didn't have to mention the terms 'UFO' or 'flying saucer': they could be relied on to appear spontaneously as their story spread. That story is essentially junk,[2] but the grain of truth from which it grew is that in 1965 no one really had much idea of what did happen to Col Horace Beauchamp and his men – who were, indeed, mostly never seen again after they enthusiastically advanced ahead of their comrades in 163 Brigade, losing touch with them, and becoming easy prey to an enemy defending his own ground.

It *was* known, to those who cared to find out, that in September 1919 a British War Graves Registration Unit found 180 bodies of British soldiers, of whom 122 were 1/5 Norfolks, in a ravine. They had been thrown there by a Turkish farmer who had found them in and around his house, where they had apparently made their last stand. That still leaves 145 men unaccounted for. There is nothing peculiar about this distressing fact from World War I, in which thousands disappeared in mud, blood, and sludge. It isn't even peculiar to the events of 12 August 1915. Philip Dutton, of the Imperial War Museum, has noted[3] that the 1/5 Suffolks (on the left flank of the advance) too can claim a comparable 'disappearance' in the shambles of 12 August 1915. Eleven officers and 178 other ranks were killed, wounded or missing, of whom the unit history records:

> *"Only three men afterwards were reported prisoners, so all these Officers, NCOs and men must be presumed to have been killed. It is thought that these fine men were the foremost and quickest to advance, and in their keenness had bravely rushed forward in isolated parties and without adequate support. They seemed to have completely disappeared. No one came back who could give an account of what had happened to them.*
>
> *Dutton's one comment: 'Sounds familiar.'"*

A PATTERN EMERGES?

These two examples – infamous enough to justify detailed demolition, in our view – of supposedly anomalous disappearances do and don't suggest that there's an underlying structure to the development of such accounts. Historical fact and reporters' ill-judged phrasing combine in these two instances to create an aura of mystery and inspire (if that's the word) meretricious elaborations. The pattern is repeated elsewhere, as in the supposedly weird disappearance of three lighthousemen from Eilan Mòr in 1900: the trigger in this case was an 'imaginative' report in the local paper, which was duly elaborated by later writers who didn't bother to check readily available investigative reports. Possibly the daftest of these come-lately commentaries oozed from the pen of John Michell, who in *The Flying Saucer Vision*[4] proposed that there had been "an extraordinary repetition of an ancient sacrificial ceremony. The men were taken over from the Long Island near Callernish and ferried over to the island of the dead, Eilean Mór, where they were installed in a tower, similar to those once used for human sacrifice… The ritual of human sacrifice to the little gods of the western islands was re-enacted." Or perhaps not. A giant wave or two, far from unknown in those seas, make for a simpler explanation.

Had we space, we might consider the effect of legendries such as ufology as broad 'triggers' on the interpretation of events such as the genuinely puzzling disappearance of amateur airman Frederick Valentich in 1978. Coming full circle, we could demonstrate how the factitious tales of the disappearances of David Lang, Oliver Larch and Oliver Thomas illustrate our contention that simple explanations (for almost anything) are rarely satisfactory. That two of these stories are grounded in fictions written by a man – Ambrose Bierce – who himself disappeared mysteriously adds irony of a kind, perhaps. But we don't have the space; we too must now disappear into the great continuum. FT

NOTES

1 *Memoirs and Correspondence of Dr Henry Bathurst, Lord Bishop of Norwich* (London, 1853). Quoted by Mike Dash in "The Disappearance of Benjamin Bathurst", **FT54:40–44**; *Fortean Times* 54 (Summer 1990); also available at www.mikedash.com/extras/forteana/bb. THA is greatly indebted to Dr Dash's research, which reveals a multitude of details that point to a mundane robbery and murder.

2 An early and excellent deconstruction of the 'vanishing Norfolks' legend as told by Reichardt & Co is in Paul Begg: summary in **FT27:35–38** and *Into Thin Air*, David & Charles 1979: see pp40–51.

3 Philip Dutton: "Suvla: The attack of the 163rd Brigade, 12th August 1915", IWM 2000. See: www.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/2/gallipoli/pdf_files/azmak.pdf. Dutton also points out that – contrary to legend – of the many dead and missing 1/5 Norfolks, only one officer and 16 men were from the Sandringham estate.

4 Sidgwick & Jackson 1967; Abacus edition 1974, p131. Quoted by Mike Dash in "The Vanishing Lighthousemen of Eilean Mor", *Fortean Studies* No. 4, John Brown 1998, pp50–80; see p57, n38. The reverence accorded Michell, who once described David Icke as "surely one of the great minds of our age", seems a trifle misplaced, while his rôle as trickster and *provocateur* has been almost universally overlooked.

See also Paul Chambers: "The Vanishing", **FT194:40–44**.

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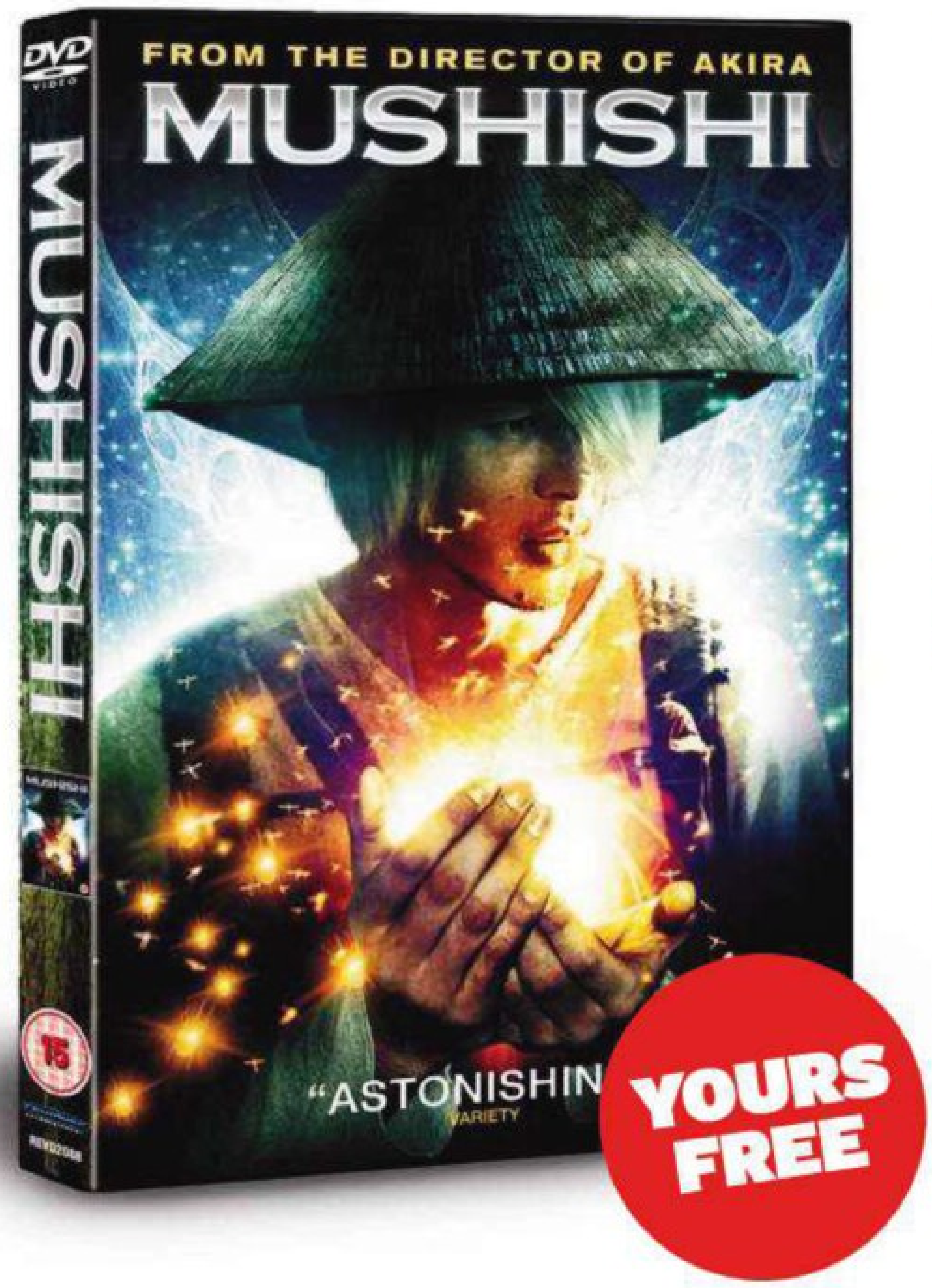

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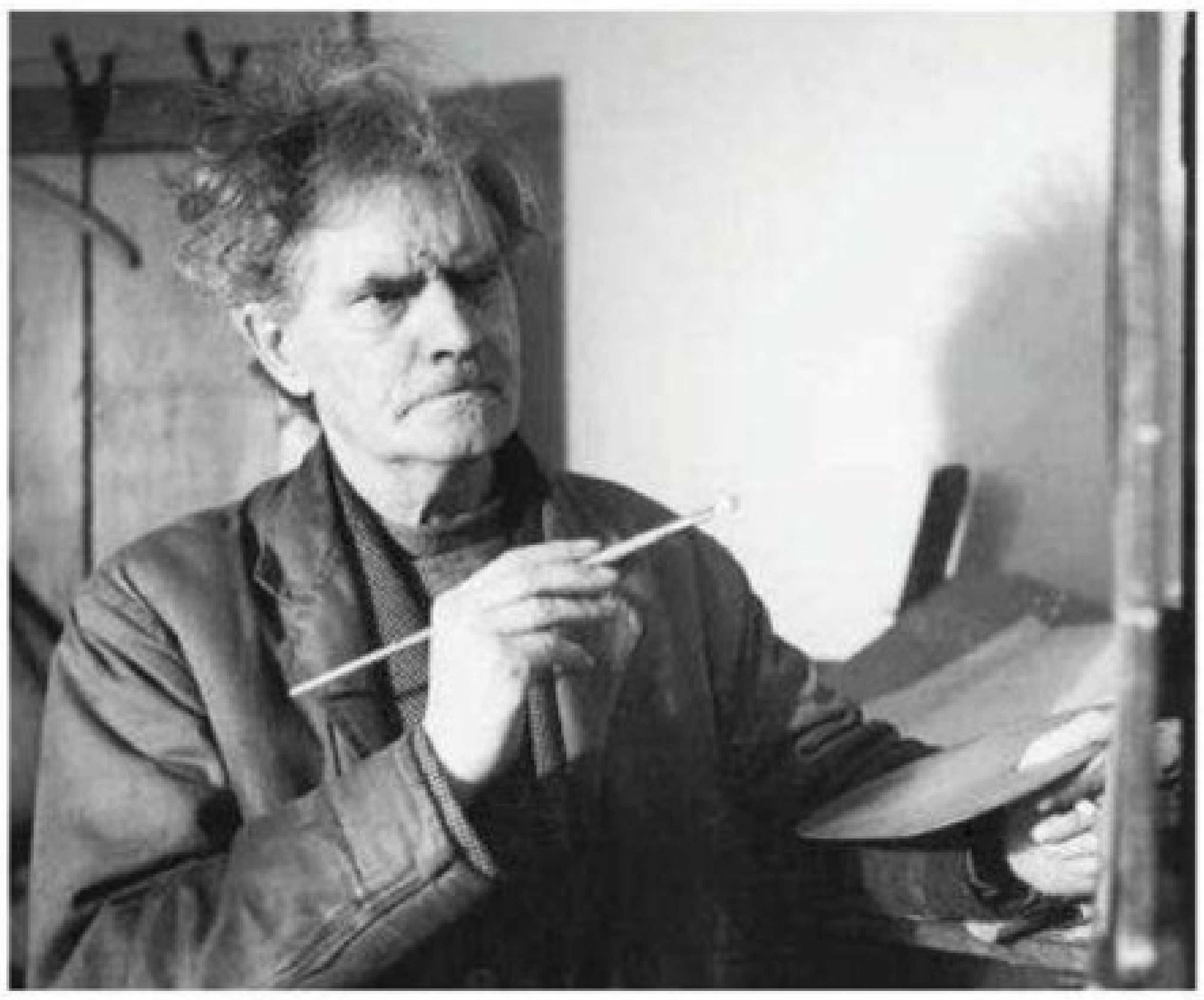
A new Golden Dawn?

JAMIE GREGORY asks whether putting away the wand and getting out the paintbrush is the 21st-century way forward for the ancient art of magic.

JAMIE GREGORY is an ex-monk who likes to make odd little films which he posts on YouTube.



ABOVE: Austin Osman Spare; a magical artist at work.

BERT HARDY/PICTURE POST/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Aleister Crowley's intention, was "to synthesize the aim of religion and the method of science", he wrote in *Equinox*, the journal of his magickal order (magick being Crowley's preferred spelling).

The magical view that our world is governed by spiritual entities of one sort or another has figured in European history from the cave-enshrined visions of our Palæolithic ancestors to the alchemical remedies of the Swiss doctor Paracelsus (1493–1591), considered a grandfather of modern medicine. But the stratospheric rise of science curtailed magic's role as a social force in mainstream belief. In an article entitled "Fossil Angels", Alan Moore (*Watchmen*; *V for Vendetta*, etc.) wrote that "Science… magic's gifted, pushy offspring, its most practical and thus materially profitable application, very soon decided that the ritual and symbolic lumber of its alchemic parent-culture was redundant." [1]

But Peter Grey and Alkistis Dimech, co-founders of Scarlet Imprint esoteric publishers, challenge this view: "We would disagree with the idea that magic is a form of proto-science that can be replaced by technology… As consumer culture, corporations, and currency spiral into dark nightmare, we are seeing a resurgence of magick as we actively re-enchant our disenchanted world." [2]

This growth in the need for re-enchantment has also coincided with the decline in that other casualty of the rational revolution, religion. Over the past three centuries, science has challenged any literal acceptance of the 'truths' of Western religions, and this in turn has led to an erosion in the value of the numinous in everyday life; in fact, it's now considered little more than a neural epiphenomenon in some circles.

"Magick… offers to the contemporary practitioner what it always has, a path which leads to direct experience," say Grey and Dimech. "The current generation has the potential to revitalise magick in the West on a scale not witnessed since the Golden Dawn." (The 19th-century occult order of the Golden Dawn boasted several notable members, such as Crowley, Florence Farr and poet WB Yeats).

This sort of "direct experience" is one thing, but if it is to be of any social value at all, magic needs a role. In the past, a relationship with the numinous had practical uses relating to everyday needs and wants – healing, fertility, conflict and so on. These have long been superseded by technology. Moore goes on to suggest that the arts (visual, literary, musical) could be the new vehicle for magic.

Peter Grey agrees: "We have a chance that artists now, rather than being the purveyors of illusions, can be real visionaries, which is innately magical. The artist can image the world as they dream it, as they will it, as they desire it."

However, Robert Ansell, managing director of esoteric publisher Fulgur Ltd, strikes a cautionary note to the suggestion that magic can be something apart from or above the creative process "'Magick is not the source of creativity; creativity is the source of magick."

Whatever one believes about magic's potential impact on the arts, what is undeniable is the growing number of high-quality books from small esoteric publishing companies – Fulgur, Scarlet Imprint, Starfire & Xoanon, to name but a few – that are a mixture of art object and working grimoire. These books are arguably works of art in themselves, and are eagerly sought after by collectors – some of the rarer works (like those of the late Kenneth Grant, pupil of Crowley and founder of the Typhonian Order) command hundreds – in some cases thousands – of pounds, particularly in their deluxe issues.

Undoubtedly, a major influence here is the work of Austin Osman Spare who, with the recent publication of his biography by Phil Baker, [3] might at last be beginning to enjoy some mainstream attention. Spare is a case in point: here was an artist who used magical forms of his own devising as well as the more conventional subject matter of the fine artist. Perhaps, when looking at the possible influence of magic on art, it is necessary to remember that *all* artists need to access inspiration. As Michael Staley, founder of Starfire, the publishing arm of the Typhonian order, points out: "many artists and writers have evolved their own techniques for drawing upon inspiration. These techniques may not be formally occult, but they are clearly something akin. Ritual, for instance, can be simply a number of actions that focus the mind and prepare for working… Under the term 'magic' or 'occult praxis' we include techniques which are in everyday use; occultists just do it more consciously, or call a spade a spade if you like."

Historically, art originated to capture inner visions; for millennia, it remained close to religion in an attempt to express the ineffable; then it became secularised, split off, and went its own way down diverse tracks. Perhaps our general wandering away from the realm of 'spirit' has now gone too far and in this rational age the never slumbering irrationality of the human psyche is making its desire for resurgence known using all means available.

As Morrissey once sang, "This story is old, I know, but it goes on." FT

NOTES

[1] ABRAXAS 2 (Fulgur, April 2011) & http://glycon.livejournal.com/13888.html.

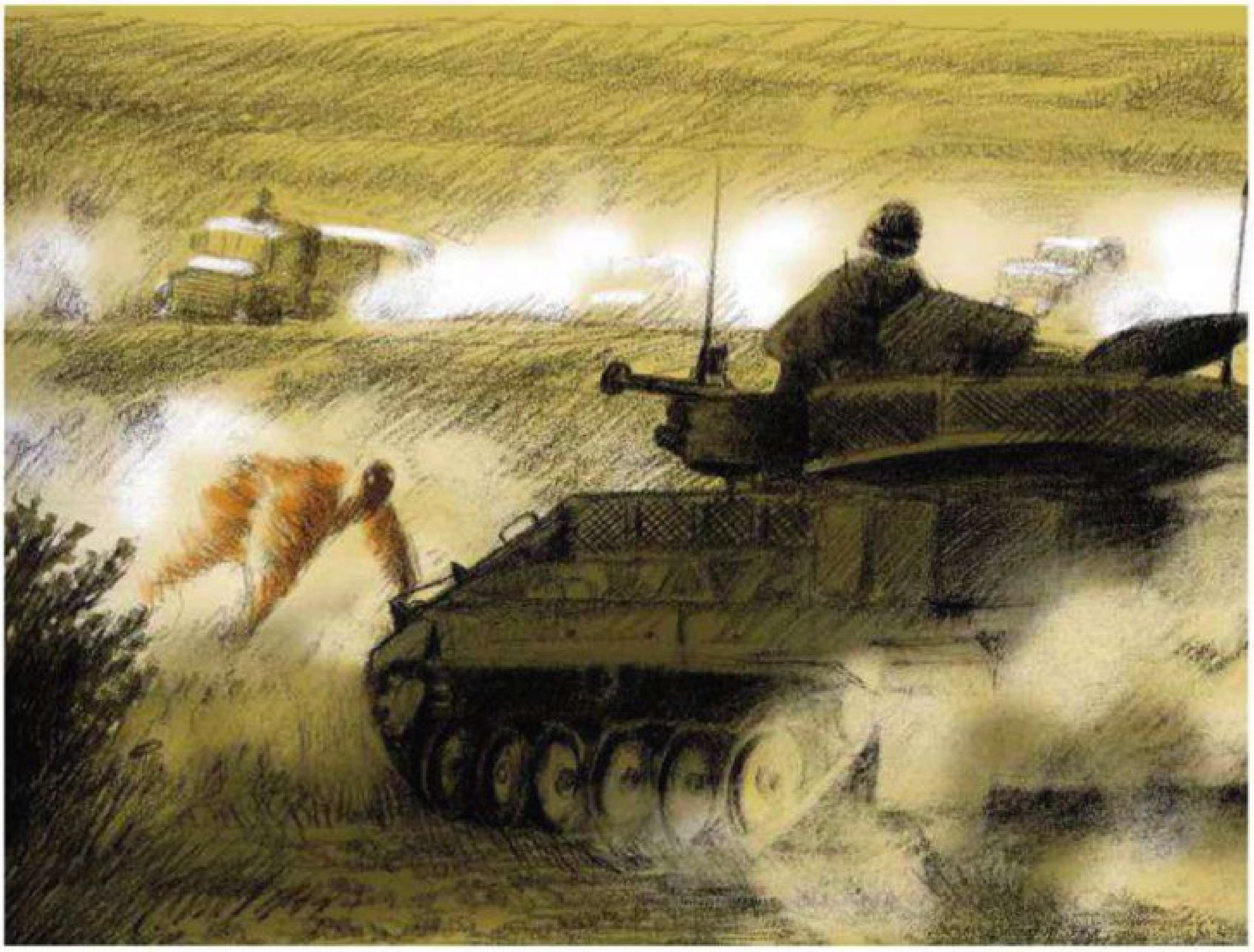
[2] All quotes from personal emails.

[3] Phil Baker: *Austin Osman Spare: The Life and Legend of London's Lost Artist*, Strange Attractor Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-907222-01-6.

The ABC X-Files

Reports of Alien Big Cats in the British countryside are all in a day's work for **MERRILY HARPUR**, but an apeman on Salisbury Plain and a Gollum-like creature in Lancashire suggest that far stranger things than mystery felids stalk the land...

MERRILY HARPUR is a freelance writer, cartoonist and the author of *Mystery Big Cats* (Heart of Albion, 2006). She runs the ABC website www.dorsetbigcats.org and is active in www.bigcatsinbritain.org.



SIBYLLE DELACROIX

If Britain's Alien Big Cats (ABCs) live in the interstices between the real and the unbelievable, there seem to be other – even odder – creatures which share that intermediate, daimonic reality. People who see them often report them to the national ABC research group *Big Cats In Britain* for want of anyone else to tell. Their testimonies present a picture of legion existences, shading in and out of 'species', categories and dimensions in an agreeably fortean way.

For instance, it was while asking a Gotham farmer about a conventional (if I may use that word) ABC sighting that researcher Nigel Spencer unearthed the man's previous sighting of a different, weirder animal. It was "very large, the size of a small bull – six foot [1.8m] long; very muscular build, with a huge head and its tongue hanging out". It was curiously coloured: "light brown with prominent dark brown spots, like knots on a piece of timber". It had a long tail and it ran at speed as they chased it in the Land Rover, "clearing a six-foot [1.8m] fence with ease". What *was* that?

On 4 September 2004, a man at Poynings near Brighton, Sussex, went out on to his patio and saw an animal bigger than a large dog and with very bright red fur, "brighter and more vivid than an Afghan hound", and a long bushy tail, pacing slowly around the adjacent field. "The animal turned and ran with spectacular speed across the field... It bounded in a very distinctive way, both sets of legs (front and back) precisely synchronised with each other and moving in opposite directions." He anticipates our reaction: "IT WAS NOT A FOX; I HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR 20 YEARS AND I SEE FOXES ALL THE TIME. It bore no resemblance to a fox. I am genuinely bemused by this animal".

I turned to my 5 o'clock and looked at a large, ape-like figure

So far, so relatively normal. George Price, however, reported something several degrees stranger – something which had lived in his mind, as clear as day, for eight years. It happened in September 2002, when he was serving in the Army. He wrote:

"We were on exercises on Salisbury Plain. I was a commander in the turret of our tank, and we were advancing to contact our warriors. I was scanning the landscape when I turned to my 5 o'clock and looked right at a large, ape-like figure. It looked scared because of the noise from the engines and tanks were moving at speed all around. I couldn't believe my eyes, so I punched my gunner to look at it because he couldn't hear me over the engine. We both saw it run into nearby prickly shrubs.

"Its fur was similar to an orang-utan in colour, and the length and flow of it. Its face looked black, or darkish, but I couldn't see its facial features, being too high an angle above it. It was more its gait – the way it moved: it was very fast and seemed to run with large strides. Its height was impressive too, it must have been 6ft-plus, but it seemed to run with its back low, i.e. bent over. It was an amazing sight to see it disappear into the shrubs. I kept staring at the spot as my tank was moving away but it never emerged again, as if there was a hole below the bush it dived into. I observed the area at distance for a while via the tank's optics but nothing else was seen. It must have been terrified to move with half the British army tearing Salisbury Plain up.

"I told my superiors as soon as we stopped but it was laughed off so I never

mentioned it much after. I did ask my gunner about it and he said he had seen it but not well enough to describe it. It has bothered me to this day, so I thought I would share it with you. I wish I had stopped to see it now. It was right next to me. Very strange."

Witnesses such as George are just as amazed at what they saw as you and I would be, and just as sure that what they are looking at is part of our everyday, tangible reality. However, the subtle, slippery gradations between that reality and another are well described by Darla, a Canadian woman living in Lancashire, who recorded one of the strangest sightings in the BCIB files. The event took place, perhaps significantly, at a liminal place in the landscape – a boundary between sea and lake; and her narrative thoughtfully includes the daimonic signifiers – such as the three unusual waves, the "thick and strange" atmosphere – that precede and conclude the event.

Darla wrote:

"I live in the beautiful Lytham St Anne's area with my husband Jeff, who is British.

On the 19th of March 2010, my husband and I were sitting in our car at Fairhaven Lake in Lytham just before midnight. It was a very nice evening and we were enjoying the peace and tranquillity. There was no moon that night, but the air seemed very still and the lights shining onto the lake made things rather romantic and relaxing.

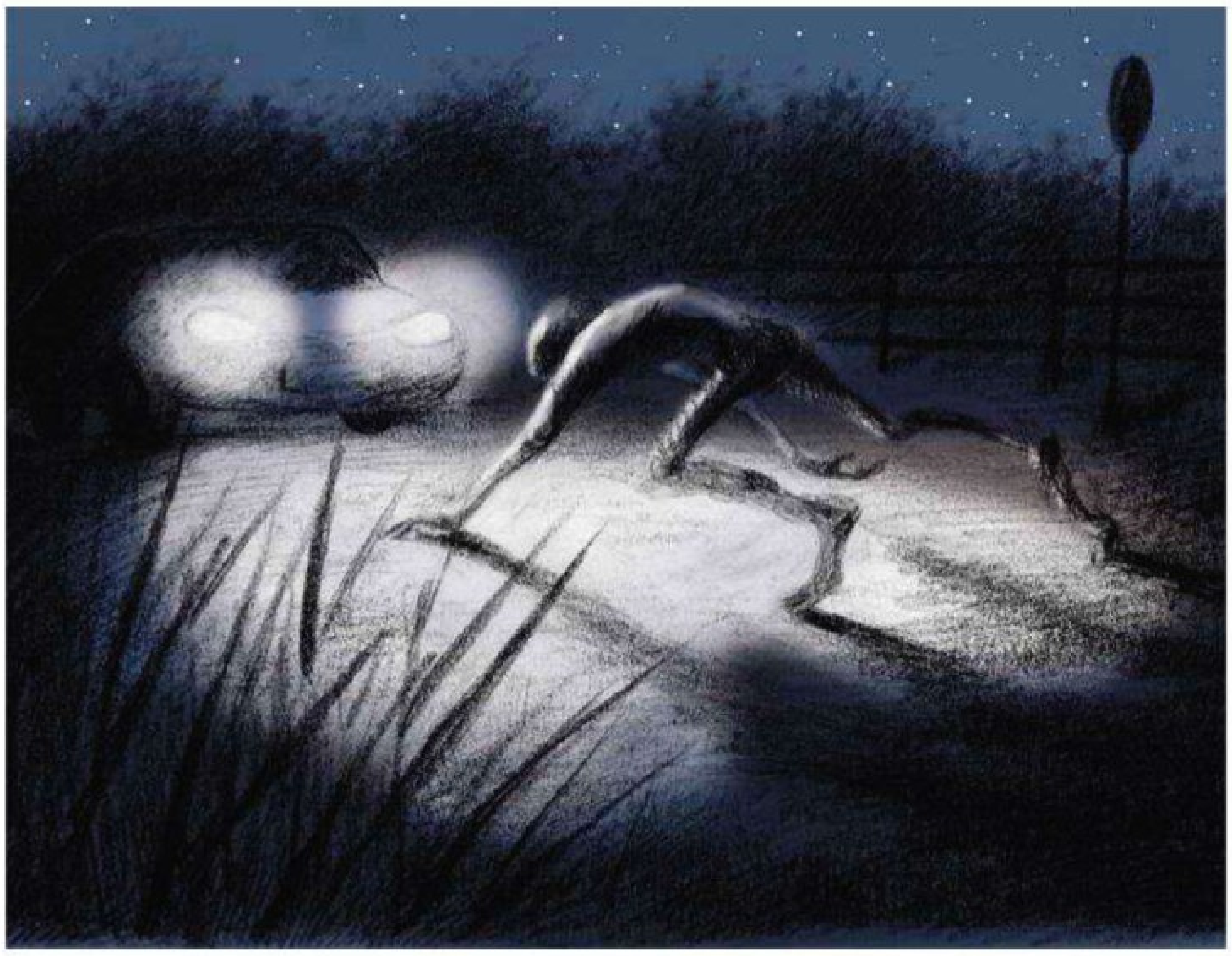
"We were both feeling very calm, talking about how nice it was, when I suddenly heard the tide come up from behind us. I found it a bit strange to hear the tide due to the fact that it doesn't reach the shore that often.

"I said to my husband excitedly, 'Listen to the waves!' I thought it strange that we never noticed the sound of the waves before, or why they seemed a bit strong, but at the same time it was a very soothing sound to hear.

"After the tide hit the sea wall approximately three times it stopped.

"We turned our focus back to Fairhaven Lake, but as we looked out in front of us, we noticed there was a strange animal crawling around. At first we thought it was a fox, since previous to this night we had seen two foxes on separate occasions. I was excited – I like foxes – and seeing another would have made the night just as good as the waves, the lights on the lake and our own relaxed, happy demeanour at the time.

"At second glance, it seemed the shape and outline of the animal was quite different from a fox, and we continued to look on, wondering what it might be. It was dark so we assumed it was most likely a dog. We waited to see its owner walk up in front of the car after this strange dog, but nothing. The animal still remained in front of our car and we began to study it.



SIBYLLE DELACROIX

"It hopped once, then stopped, and my husband and I joked that it was a kangaroo. I said 'No, it's way too small for that, it must be a wallaby, hahaha.' My husband than suggested that we turn our headlights on it to get a better view.

"When the lights came on, I was instantly startled and wished for the lights to be turned off, not just because of the sight in front of me, but I felt a strange sort of pity for the creature and didn't want to scare it.

"I discussed this several times with my husband to confirm the accuracy of the sighting, and we both recall and described the same thing. It was about the size of a medium-sized dog, except for its legs, which seemed to be much too long for its body. Its limbs were twisted, and gnarled or knotted in places (almost like misplaced muscles). It was brownish in colour, with no fur at all, and I do not recall a tail or ears.

"I say that it was, in my mind, a sort of mediæval-ish creature, best described as 'Gollum' (a character from the Lord of the Rings *movies).*

"It looked up at us as soon as the headlights came on and it snarled, squinting with one eye. I guessed it was due to the light shining on it. It had a face, almost human-like but deformed in a way. It was eating something which we couldn't see. It did not look happy, we did notice that; it looked very sad, miserable and evil.

"I cannot make an accurate match with this creature, in resemblance, to any other animal I have ever seen in my ENTIRE LIFE.

"It crawled away eventually, but not in a way any other animal moves – sort of a slither/crawl type movement, twisting its body as it travelled on and eventually out of our sight, heading toward the path along the seafront.

"My husband and I were in total shock. We looked at each other and said, 'Wow that was really weird, what was that?!?!?!' We decided after a minute or two to get out of the car and have a look around.

"We did, very briefly. However, the night seemed to change, the atmosphere was now thick and strange, and when we looked towards the path it terrified us, and we did not feel safe any more. We got back in our car and drove away.

"I'm not sure what that was we saw, or if anyone else has seen it as well. I know one thing, that is the strangest creature we have ever encountered, and definitely a good memory/story for our future grandchildren. We thought we would share this with people to see if anyone else has had any similar experiences. Thank you." FT

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The doctor and the living dead

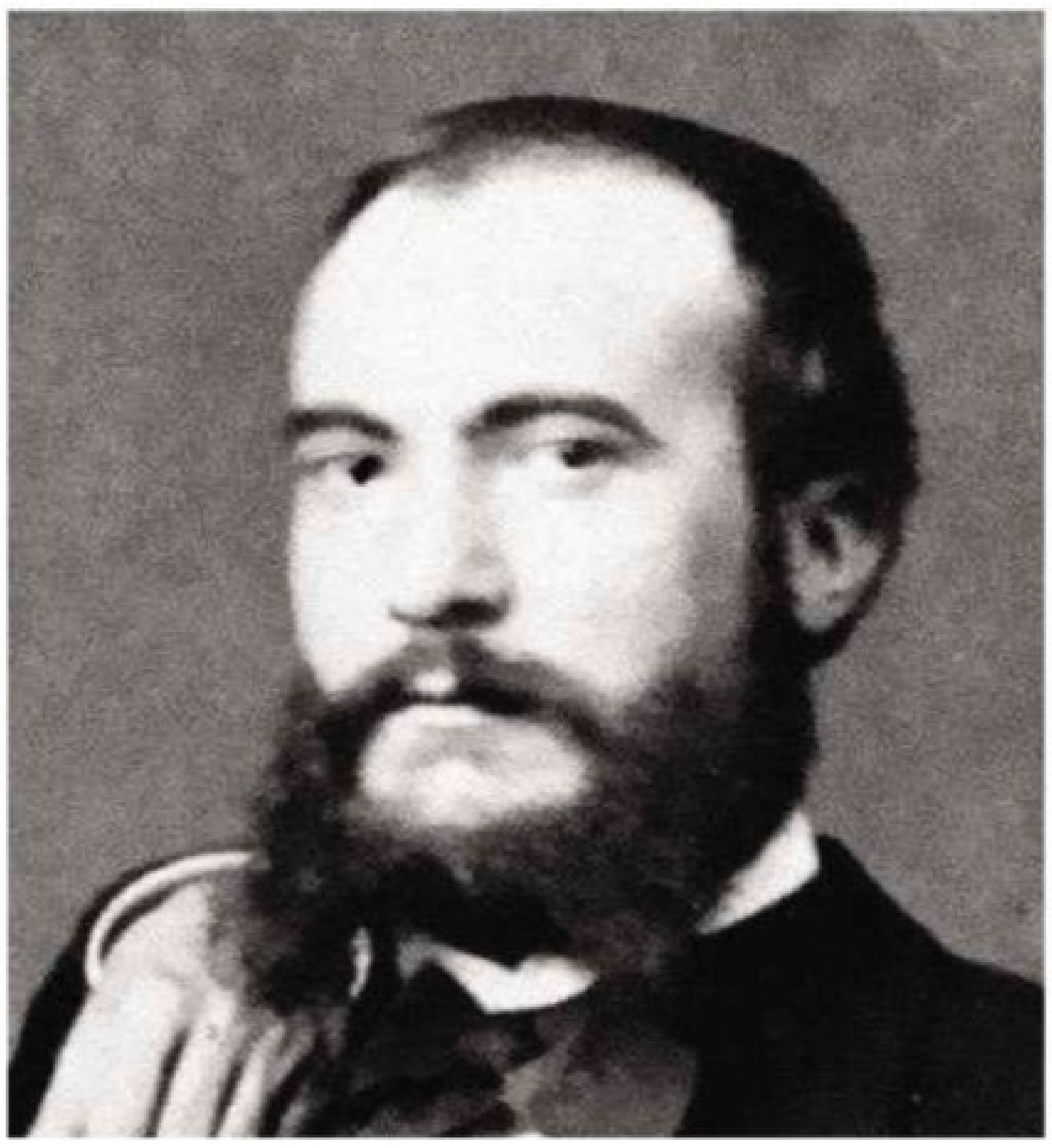
MARK GREENER looks back at a Proustian doctor and an incredibly strange syndrome that makes people stop living and become mixed-up zombies...

MARK GREENER is an award-winning medical journalist and ex-research biologist with a long-standing interest in slipstream and anomalous science. He is a frequent *FT* contributor.

In the late 1870s, a 43-year-old French woman who'd been interned for several years at Vanves asylum, southwest of Paris, told her doctors that she had "no brain, nerves, chest, or entrails, and was just skin and bone". She denied the existence of God and the Devil, believed that she did not need food and "would live forever", yet still asked to be burned alive. Her physician, Jules Cotard, realised that she suffered from a previously unrecognised psychiatric condition. After studying similar cases, Cotard characterised the syndrome as a variation of anxious depression, complicated by suicidal behaviour, insensitivity to pain and delusions of damnation, possession, non-existence or immortality. Cotard felt his eponymous syndrome could help explain some cases of demonic possession and certain myths of immortality. I believe that the syndrome might also have contributed to legends of vampires, werewolves and zombies.

Cotard was born on 1 June 1840 in Issoudun, central France, and read medicine in Paris, obtaining his doctorate in 1868. He studied alongside Adrien Proust, who became a prominent Parisian clinician and the father of novelist Marcel. Later, Cotard lent his name to 'Professor Cottard' in Marcel Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*.[1]

At Cotard's funeral – he died on 19 August 1889 after contracting diphtheria from his daughter – the eminent French psychiatrist Jules Falret (1824–1902) described him as "a profound and original thinker, given to paradox, but guided by a robust sense of reality". *A La Recherche* notwithstanding, Cotard's posthumous fame rests on his eponymous syndrome, first described at a meeting of the *Societié Médico-Psychologique* on 28 June 1880. Indeed, Cotard's syndrome is among the most dramatic and profoundly strange of all mental illnesses. (See "The Quick and the Undead" by Nick Warren, **FT159:25**).



ÉTUDES

MALADIES CÉRÉBRALES
ET MENTALES
PAR
Le Docteur Jules COTARD

PARIS

TOP: Dr Jules Cotard, the first to recognise the "denial of everything" or "living dead" syndrome which came to be named after him.

ABOVE: Cotards's medical textbook outlining various psychiatric disorders.

In one recent case, for example, a man in his late 40s started hallucinating that he had rats on his arms and complained he felt "muzzy and woolly-headed". Brain scans revealed several malformed blood vessels. Several months later, he started feeling that his flesh was "falling from his bones" and that he was rotting on the inside. He could even smell putrefying flesh. The sensation lasted several days. Fortunately, radiotherapy treated the malformations and seemed to resolve his symptoms. In another case, a 59-year-old woman consulted psychiatrists after enduring electric shock-like feelings in both arms. She admitted that every few months for the last 20 years, she'd experienced episodes during which she felt as if her flesh were falling from her limbs and abdomen, and as if liquid inside her body were draining away. Once, when she looked in the mirror, it seemed as if only the bone in her lower jaw around her teeth remained. The attacks, which occurred during the night, lasted several hours.[2]

Cotard originally described the syndrome as '*délire des négations*' – "a marked tendency to denying everything". Some patients even denied that their bodies still contained their vital organs. One of the original cases – a 'Monsieur A' – visualised his head as "a hollow nut, he had no sex, no testicles, he had nothing left". Other patients, Cotard reported, "have no stomach, no brain, no head, they do not eat, they do not digest, they do not go to the bathroom, and in fact they energetically refuse food and often retain fæcal matter." After all, he remarked, without entrails food "falls into the skin of their belly", and the damned don't eat.[3]

Cotard's syndrome is, thankfully, rare. Nevertheless, enough cases have reached the pages of medical journals over the last 130 years to illustrate Cotard's perspicacity. An analysis of 100 cases of Cotard's syndrome found that 89 per cent, 65 per cent and 63 per cent of patients experienced depression, anxiety and guilt respectively. Eighty-six per cent and 69 per cent of patients reported nihilistic delusions about their body and existence respectively.[4]

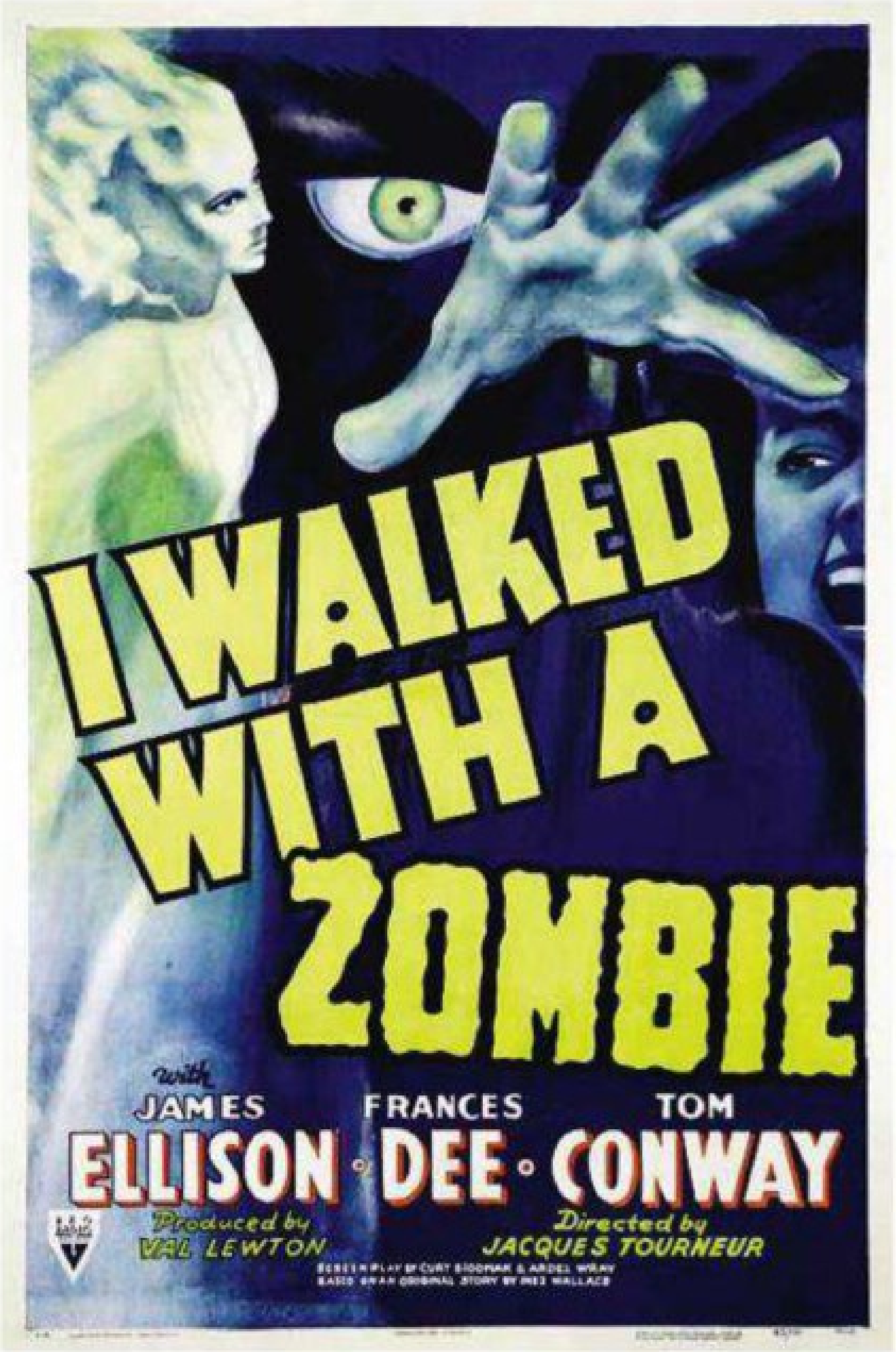
Cotard's syndrome is fascinating in its own right. But, I believe, it's possible that the disorder has also contributed to the folklore and legends surrounding many of our favourite monsters. Indeed, Cotard suggested that *délire des négations* might form the foundation of some "demonic possessions". Monsieur A, for example, claimed he had no soul and denied God's existence. Other patients deny the existence of both God and the Devil. But one of Cotard's original cases, a 53-year-old man, claimed to be the Antichrist. He wept, groaned and asked to be burned in the public square.[5] Usually, claims to be the Antichrist are grandiose, rather than nihilistic, delusions. Abnormalities of the flesh, claims to be the Antichrist, and the denial of the soul and God are hallmarks of demonic possession.

Furthermore, some French doctors consulted Cotard about patients who believed they had lost all their blood, evoking shades of vampirism.[6] Mademoiselle C, one of his original cases, claimed that she no longer retained her gullet or entrails and "had no more blood". She "begged people to open her veins, to cut off her arms and legs, to open up her body… to make certain that she had no more blood and that her organs no longer existed", Cotard says.[7] The 53-year-old 'Antichrist', also said he no blood, no pulse, no heartbeat.

A more recent case illustrates that Cotard's syndrome may contribute to lycanthropic legends. Nejad and Toofani reported the case of a 32-year-old married man admitted to Kerman Psychiatric Hospital in southern Iran after being restless, tearful and refusing to work for about two weeks. The man claimed other people remained aloof and paid him little attention. Why? Because, the man explained, he was dead. After his initial restlessness, he experienced a sensation like an electric shock that, he felt, changed his entire body. He become convinced he was no longer alive. "I speak, breathe and eat but I am dead," he told doctors. He believed that his death represented God's punishment for his sins, including an adolescent sexual contact with a sheep. On occasion, his jaw moved unconsciously, so he concluded that he and his wife metamorphosed into dogs. He also believed that his daughters' urine smelt of sheep urine – which led him to believe his daughters transformed into sheep. Nejad and Toofani note that the legendary tissue regeneration makes lycanthropes "immune from aging and from most physical diseases… They can, therefore, be virtually immortal."[8]

Many people with Cotard's syndrome share such delusions of immortality. Mademoiselle C said that "she would never die, she was neither dead nor alive, she was a supernatural person, her place was neither with the living, nor with the dead."[9] So, the syndrome might have contributed to myths of immortality for example, as Cotard remarked, that of the 'wandering Jew'. And I wonder if, perhaps, an episode of the syndrome that resolved naturally, but after a traditional healer used a particular concoction, might have contributed to the legend of the elixir of life.

Other people with Cotard's syndrome feel they are already dead, but can still move – contributing, perhaps, to myths of zombies and the undead. The first recorded case of Cotard's syndrome – reported in 1788 and identified with the benefit of hindsight – concerned an "aged woman" who developed the "unshakeable" delusion that she was dead after suffering a stroke.[10] Monsieur A regarded himself as "nothing but 'carrion'" and requested a "hole to be dug so that he could be buried like a dog". More recently, Ruminjo and Mekinulov reported the case of 'Ms L' a 53-year-old Filipino woman admitted to the psychiatric ward in New York "after complaining that she was dead" and "smelled like rotting flesh". Ms L asked her family to take her to a morgue "so that she could be with dead people".[11]



ABOVE: Could Cotard's Syndrome account for cases of zombification?

One 'dead' woman said she smelled of rotting flesh

Such symptoms (like those reported by the Iranian lycanthrope) are strikingly reminiscent of zombification. William Seabrook (1887–1945) – writer, explorer and friend of Aleister Crowley – brought zombies to the attention of the general Western reading public in his 1929 book about Haiti, *The Magic Island*. According to Seabrook, the zombie was "a soulless human corpse… a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive". Seabrook claimed he saw zombies working in a field.[12]

Nevertheless, a single explanation cannot account for the rich heritage of zombies in Haiti or traditions concerning the undead elsewhere in the world. For example, voodoo sorcerers' use of neurotoxins (most famously tetrodotoxin, which can create a deep coma and paralysis)[13] almost certainly underpins many of the stories of 'death' and resurrection. The symptoms are so similar, that I can't help wondering if an account of a Cotard's syndrome sufferer contributed to the mix of elements that developed into zombie folklore. For example, perhaps a 'zombie' recovered – the Cotard's syndrome entered remission – and recounted the experience of speaking, breathing and eating while 'dead'.

Similarly, porphyria, rabies, and psychopathological bloodlust could arguably contribute to vampire tales.[14] Lycanthropy is a well-established psychiatric diagnosis (see **FT176:22; 214:56–57**). So, Cotard's syndrome is probably one of a number of threads woven into a tapestry that has created monstrous myths of the undead. FT

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4 R Luque & GE Berrios: "Cotard's syndrome in the elderly: Historical and clinical aspects", *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 1994; 9:957–96.

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10 Gardner-Thorpe & Pearn, *op cit.*

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13 C Benedek & L Rivier: "Evidence for the presence of tetrodotoxin in a powder used in Haiti for zombification", *Toxicon*, 1989; 27:473–80. See also **FT78:28–30**; **108:15**.

14 AM Cox: "Porphyria and vampirism: another myth in the making", *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 1995; 71:643–4; J Gómez-Alonso: "Rabies: a possible explanation for the vampire legend", *Neurology*, 1998; 51:856–9. See also **FT47:12**.

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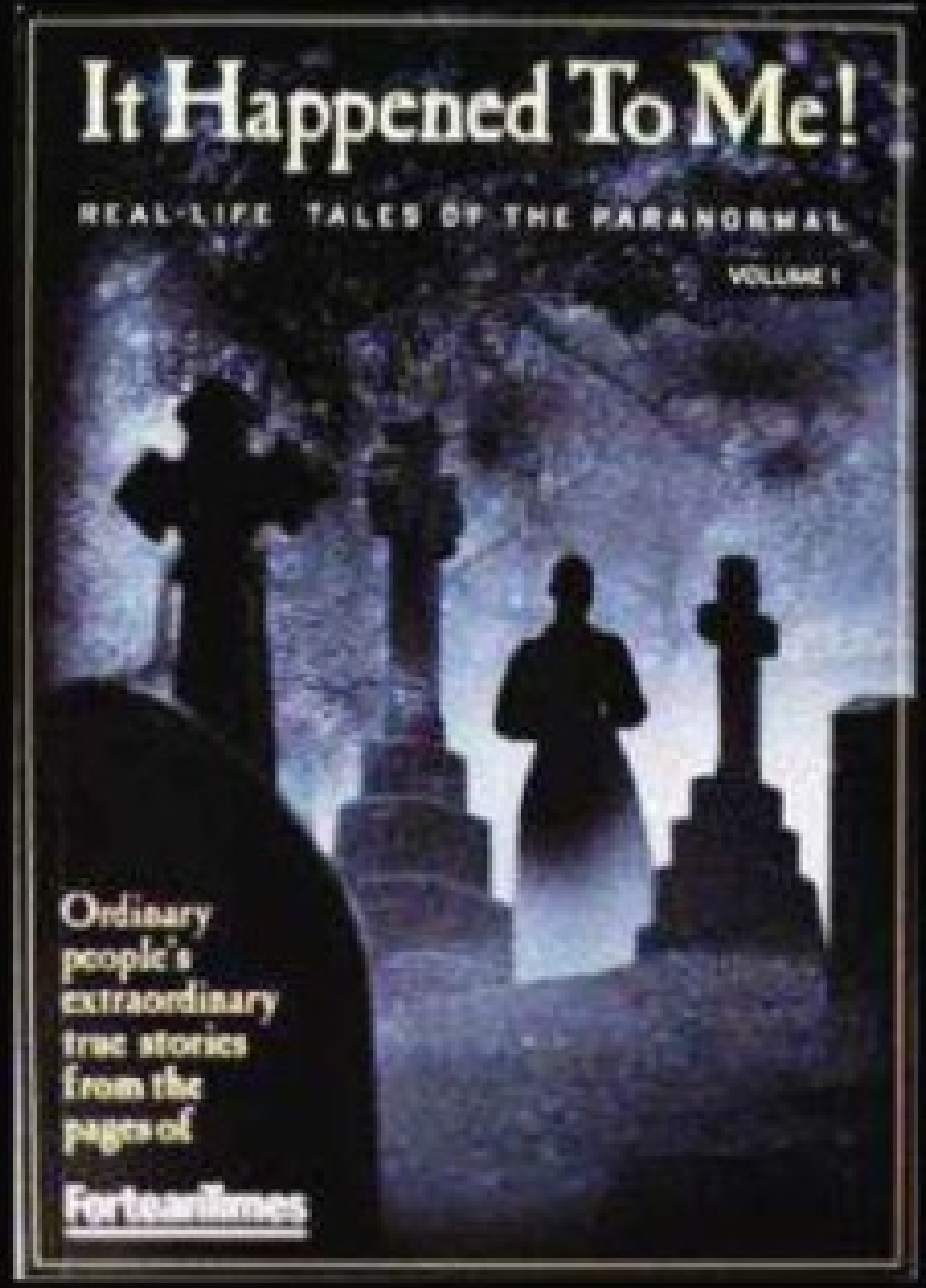
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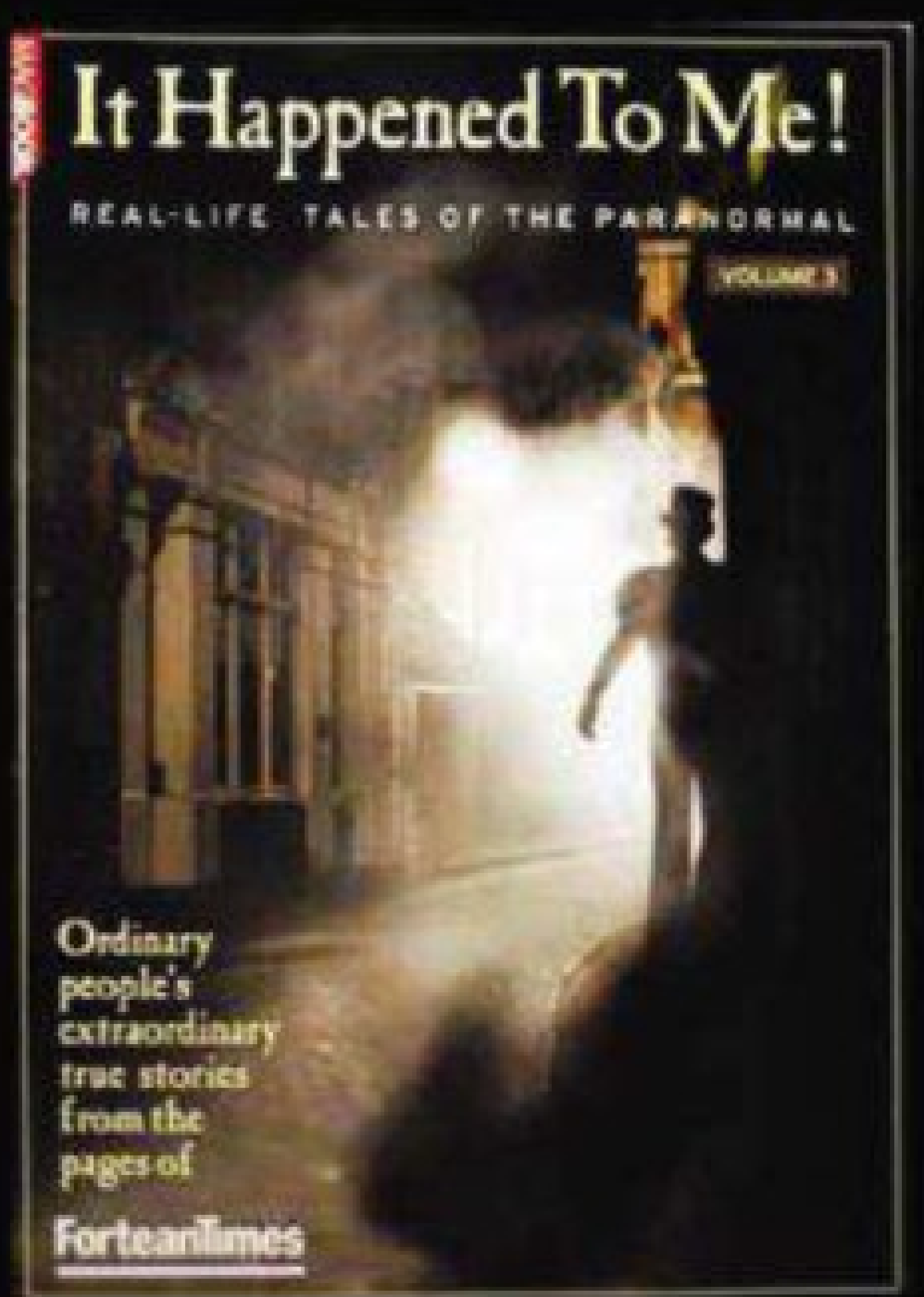
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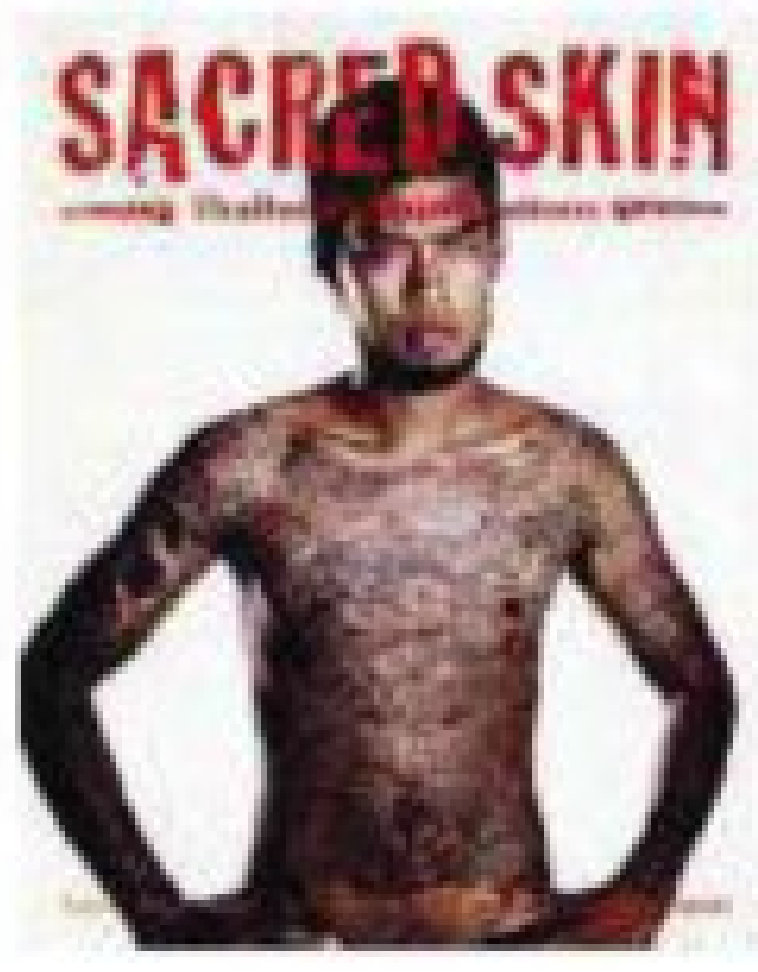
This month's books, films and games

reviews

Protection drawn on the body

Thailand's traditional spirit tattoos are unfairly stigmatised as symbolising a criminal lifestyle, but they instil community values – and deflect bullets



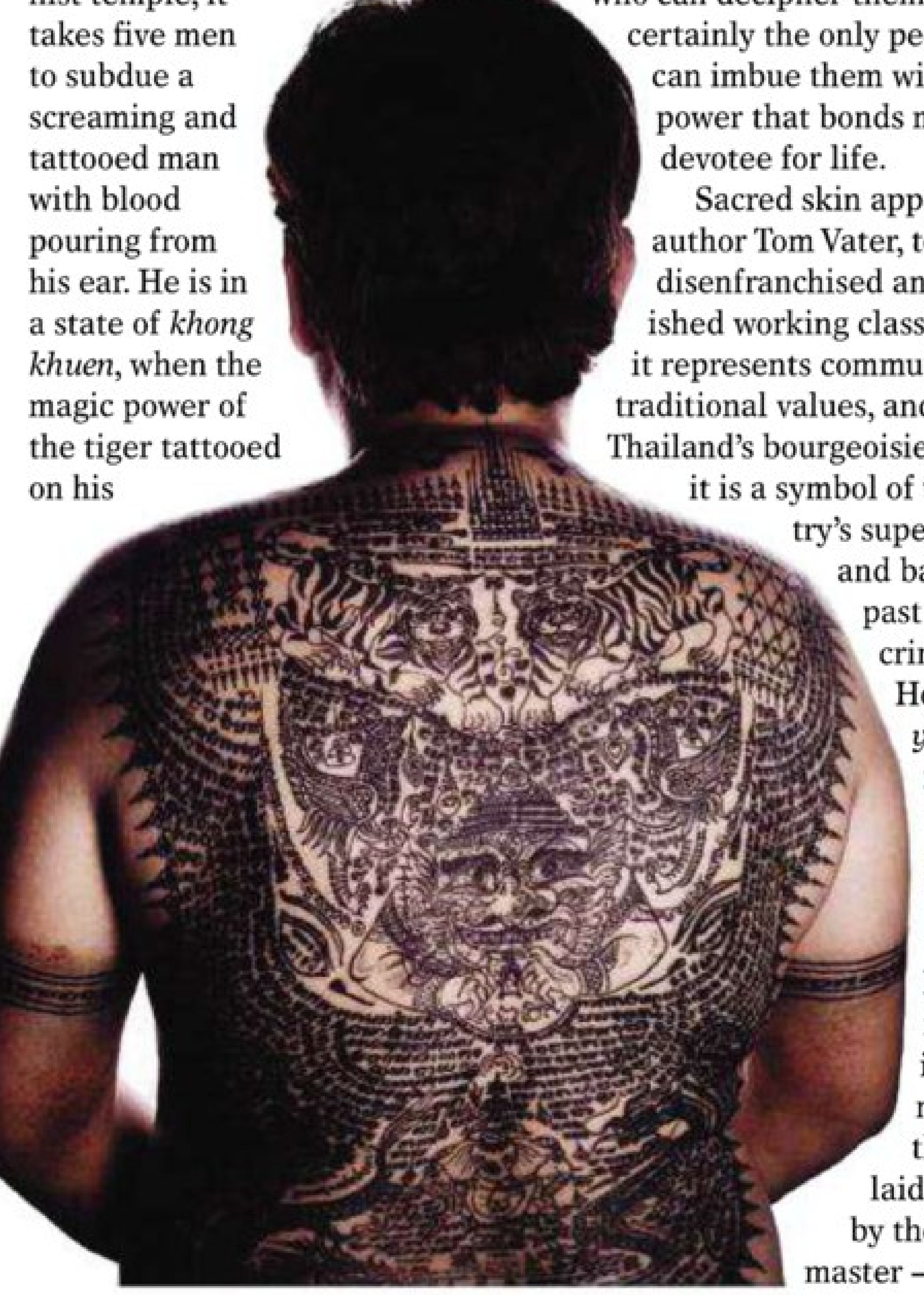
Sacred Skin

Thailand's Spirit Tattoos

Tom Vater & Aroon Thaewchatturat

Visionary World (Hong Kong) 2011
Pb, 198pp, illus, gloss, £21.00, ISBN 9789628563791
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.90

On Teacher's Day, a festival celebrating the tattoo masters of the Wat Bang Phra Buddhist temple, it takes five men to subdue a screaming and tattooed man with blood pouring from his ear. He is in a state of *khong khuen*, when the magic power of the tiger tattooed on his torso vibrates within him.

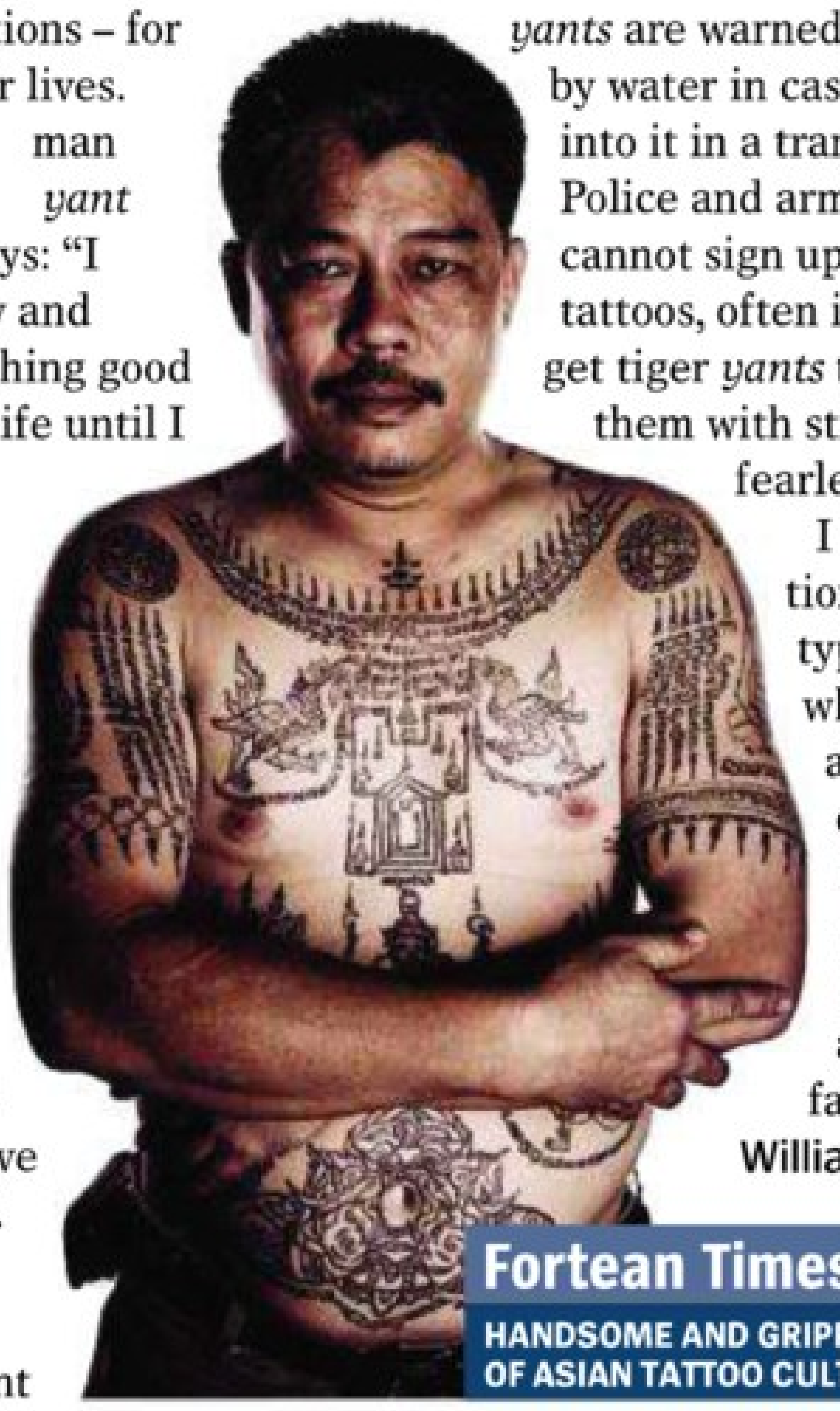


The sacred symbols of *sak yant* – sacred skin – have their origins in Hinduism, but migrated in the third or fourth century from India to Cambodia, where symbols inscribed onto amulets or their skin protected Khmer soldiers from injury, and thence to Thailand. Along the way, *sak yant* picked up elements of animism, shamanism and Buddhism, and lost its original Sanskrit text. Modern *yant* are written in an ancient Khmer script and are spoken in Pali, the liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism. The tattoo masters who apply the tattoos may be the only people who can decipher them and are certainly the only people who can imbue them with the power that bonds master and devotee for life.

Sacred skin appeals, says author Tom Vater, to the disenfranchised and impoverished working class, to whom it represents community and traditional values, and horrifies Thailand's bourgeoisie, for whom it is a symbol of the country's superstitious and backward past – and of criminality. However, *yant* imposes a code of ethics on its wearers. It will lose its power if they do not follow the rules laid down by the tattoo master – starting with Buddhism's first five precepts but often branching off into rules about respecting elders and even dietary restrictions – for the rest of their lives. Kong, a young man with a tiger *yant* on his chest, says: "I was a bully boy and never saw anything good happen to my life until I got tattooed."

> "people around me [at anti-government demonstrations] got shot, but the tattoo protected me"

The tattoo's power is the same whether it is visible or not. Sometimes just the very top – the *U-na-Lom*, which represents enlightenment – is visible above the shirt collar. "When I was taking part in anti-government demonstrations," says one modestly tattooed middle-aged woman, "people around me got shot, but the tattoo protected me."



The greater part of the book is Aroon Thaewchatturat's beautifully restrained photographs. She depicts the various sorts of *yant*, for instance the protective geometric *yant*; the charm *yant*, which attracts the opposite sex as either partners or – for sex workers – paying customers (it also enables musicians to walk in the air); and the *na*, which gives immortality. Different animals also have particular gifts. Elephants confer strength and Ganesh, the half-elephant Hindu god, removes obstacles. Hanuman helps find work, though with the proviso that he's rubbish at admin! Bird *yant* make you more persuasive, but Garuda is best avoided because it's uncontrollable. Fishermen with crocodile *yants* are warned against sitting by water in case they plunge into it in a trance and die. Police and army recruits, who cannot sign up if they have tattoos, often immediately get tiger *yants* to endow them with strength and fearlessness.

I have reservations about the typography, which is clunky and unworthy of the subject matter, but the text and photographs are absolutely fascinating.

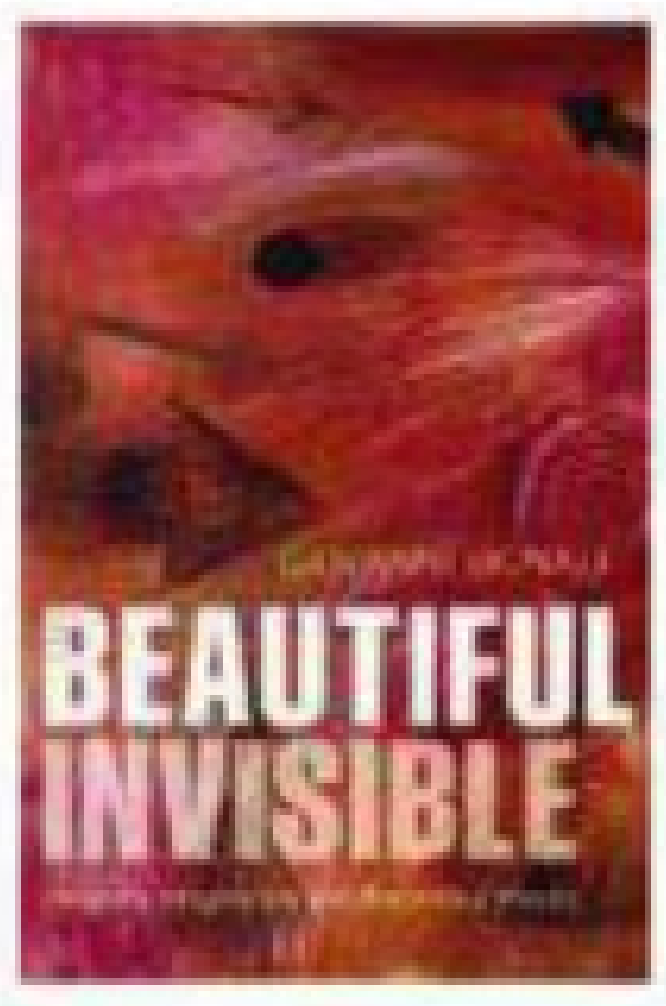
William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict

HANDSOME AND GRIPPING STUDY OF ASIAN TATTOO CULTURE **9**

Beautiful and useful

The elegance at the abstract heart of theoretical physics is revealed to the nonscientific reader by a poet scientist



The Beautiful Invisible

Creativity, Imagination, and Theoretical Physics

Giovanni Vignale

Oxford University Press 2011
Hb, 303pp, illus, notes, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9780199574841
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

Many scientists present their discipline as a bastion of rational materialism, the empirical counterweight to irrational, 'un-testable' religious and secular ideologies. But as science advances into new areas, scientists inevitably rely on abstractions and build beautiful and elegant theories on flimsy foundations, which gradually strengthen (or crash down) as experimental evidence accumulates.

As John Polkinghorne, Professor of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge, commented, particle physicists "seek theories which are compact and mathematically beautiful, in the expectation that they will then prove to be the ones realised in nature". It's a principle that's served science well over the years, as Giovanni Vignale, Curator's Professor of Physics at the University of Missouri, shows in his compelling new book.

Vignale illustrates how "a good scientific theory is like a symbolic tale, an allegory of reality" populated by "characters [that] are abstractions that may not exist in reality". Yet these abstractions offer unprecedented insights into 'reality'. In other words, scientific theory "transforms reality into [..] an illusion that has more value than the literal truth". To make his point, *The Beautiful Invisible* offers an excellent introduction to the core concepts in theoretical physics, which Vignale describes as a "modern form of theology". He demonstrates how quantum theory, one of the most 'difficult' ideas in modern physics, arises from "an abstract geometrical structure, which emerged from a careful study" of the simple systems beloved of classical mechanics, such as a pendulum swinging. His discussions of, for example, the paradoxes of relativity, quantum teleportation and entanglement (each complex, complicated and sometimes counter-intuitive), are master-classes in clarity, written with panache, enthusiasm and considerable insight.

Vignale writes more as a physicist speaking to a scientist from a different discipline than to the 'nonscientific' public. In many ways, *The Beautiful Invisible* bridges the gap between a popular science paperback and undergraduate textbooks, and reminds me of the 'physics for the biologist' I took at college. He assumes no physics or algebra beyond GCSE. He builds arguments carefully, so it's easy to follow, even if your background is in the Arts. But beyond footnotes, there are no recommendations for further reading.

Vignale's book is carefully written and closely argued, supported with telling examples. However, the focus is on the science rather than the scientist. For example, Vignale discusses eloquently Henri Poincaré's recurrence theorem. Poincaré reported being guided by a "feeling of mathematical beauty" and his "æsthetic feeling" that "the useful combinations are precisely the most beautiful". Here, and on several other occasions, I also wanted Vignale to explore how such "æsthetic feeling" informed mathematics and physics with vignettes from the perspective of the person rather than the theory alone. I feel it would help non-specialists appreciate more easily his key point, which the blurb describes as "the beauty of the abstract heart of physics".

That quibble aside, *The Beautiful Invisible* performs a remarkable feat: allowing non-physicists to 'glimpse' this "feeling of mathematical beauty" – something that is almost impossible to convey fully to a non-mathematician. Vignale describes the Hamilton equations for motion as "exceptionally symmetrical and elegant in form". To understand why a theory or formula is 'exceptional', to appreciate the nuances, you need to fully understand the mathematically mundane, and why asymmetry and inelegance is a relative anathema to the mathematical æsthetic. And that requires a formal mathematical education – probably to degree level. Yet Vignale allows you to begin to see why. I can't think of a higher tribute to his writing.

Vignale claims that "the creation of new concepts in physics requires a power of imagination comparable with, if not superior to, that found in the most abstract arts, for example poetry". Intellectual, as well as physical, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Yet understanding reality demands a poetic, as well as a scientific, perspective.

We need Eliot and Einstein, Byron and Bohr, Keats and Kelvin. We need fine art, sublime music and great literature as well as the sciences. The artist needs to understand the sciences – and *vice versa*. And *The Beautiful Invisible* offers an excellent introduction to science's ability to reach "out to an invisible reality that can never be fully comprehended".

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

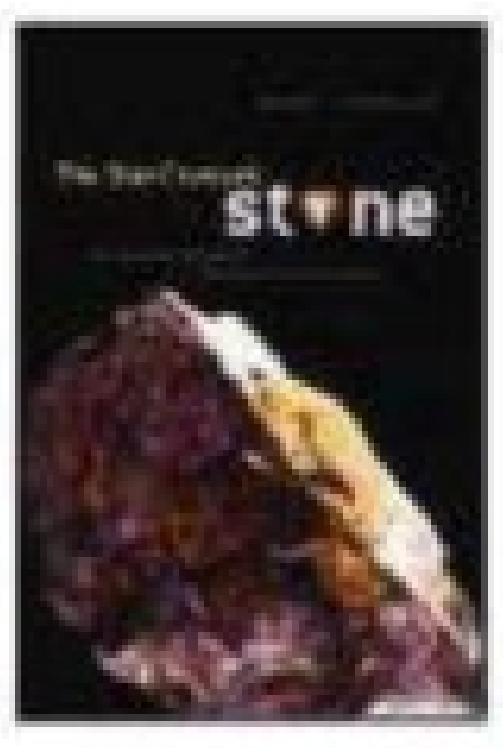
A FINE ATTEMPT TO REACH OUT TO AN INVISIBLE REALITY **8**

The Star-Crossed Stone

The Secret Life, Myths and History of a Fascinating Fossil

Kenneth J McNamara

University of Chicago Press 2011
Hb, 272pp, bib, notes, ind, £18.00/$27.50, ISBN 9780226514697
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00



Even before they were recognisably human, back in the days of *Homo heidelbergensis* and *H.erectus*, people collected fossil sea urchins, took them to places where such fossils didn't naturally occur, and were buried with them.

The world record-holder for fossil sea urchins found in a single grave is at least 147, and possibly as many as 200, arranged in a ring around 'Maud', a Neolithic woman unearthed in Dunstable Downs in 1887. Roughly contemporary with her is a specimen of *Echinolampus africanus* recovered from the tomb of the architect Kha in ancient Egypt's Heliopolis, carved with an inscription from around 2000 BC identifying the fossil as "found in the south part of quarry at Sodpu by Tja-Nefer". McNamara suggests the quarry (possibly in Sinai, and dedicated to a god associated with several star constellations) could have been known for its "star stones."

A more recent sea urchin burial featured one clasped in the cold, dead hand of a Saxon woman in Bury St Edmunds. Some French barrows from Neolithic times to the Iron Age seem to have been built around fossil sea urchins and nothing else.

Why? The five-pointed star with a hole in the centre, unique in nature to echinoderms (urchins and starfish), is the only natural example of so many axes of symmetry. Our ancestors started collecting fossil urchins around the time their brains were beginning to grasp concepts like symmetry, and making leaps into expressions of abstract ideas and 'art'. The fossil sea urchin's mysterious symmetry may have been humankind's first-ever sacred geometry.

Urchins were modified – chipped out to take away the matrix around the star, or drilled to make into pendants or necklaces. From the very earliest days of tool-making, axes and scrapers were made from flints, with embedded fossil urchins carefully centred on the tool and sometimes used as a grip.

Once you've revealed the fascinating fact that we've been collecting fossil sea urchins since the dawn of humankind, there's only so much you can say on the subject. McNamara says it over and over, padded out with too much atmospheric detail. While it's nice to have some flavour of the conditions in which discoveries were made, the scene-setting of an imagined cold and frosty morning experienced by an archæologist in 1911 in the South Downs is too much. As are McNamara's reminiscences of a childhood spent collecting Brooke Bond Tea cards.

But just when you want him to get to the point, McNamara shines with a mercifully fast-paced potted history of palæontology, including proto-fortean martyr Bernard Pallisey, who "took a great delight in thumbing his nose" at the "learned writers of the time". Pallisey announced that fossils were not the results of the Earth's "plastic virtue" that spontaneously produced simulacra of natural forms, but petrified animals. For his pains he died in the Bastille.

Other highlights are epic narratives of complex ancient Egyptian cosmology and the fall and rebirth of the gods of Asgard, and where fossil urchins fit into these belief systems. (To the Vikings, fossil urchins were "thunderstones".)

McNamara relates how sea urchins increasingly became less an object to accompany the dead into the afterlife and more an amulet of good luck or protection for the living, right up to 1929, when folklorist Herbert Toms photographed the collections of urchins that were then common on windowsills across Sussex.

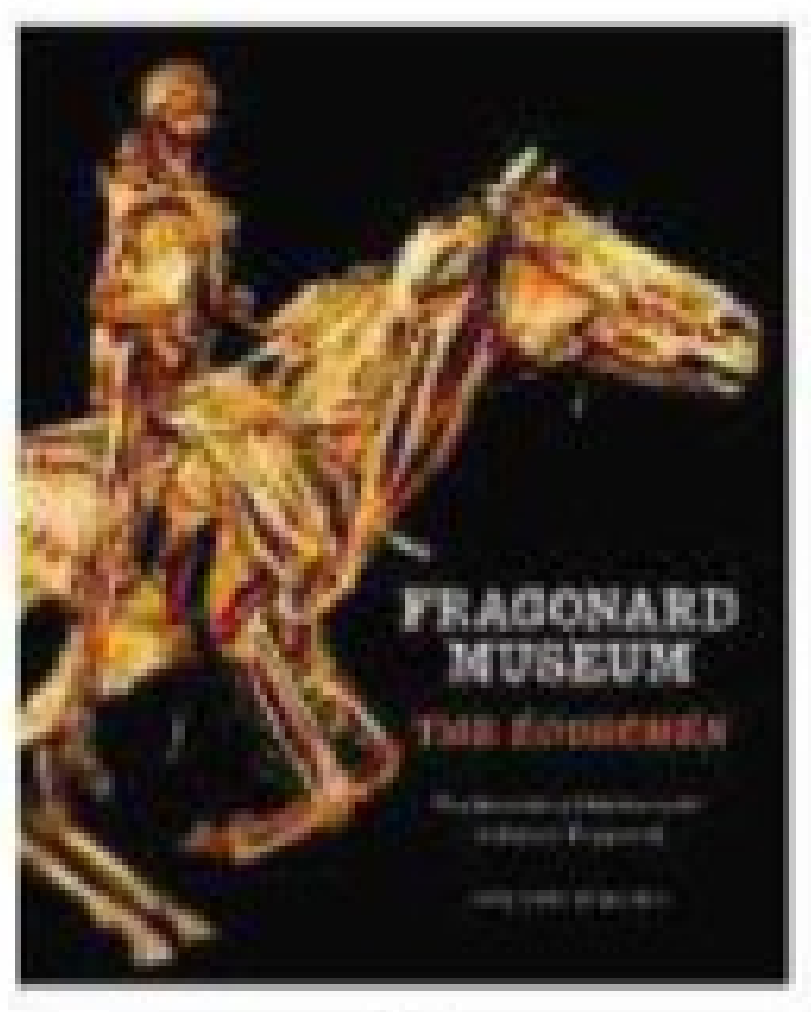
The bibliography, footnotes and index are excellent.

Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict
ENTERTAINING PALÆONTOLOGY/ ARCHÆOLOGY CROSSOVER **7**

Plastinates precursor

A cousin of the more famous painter left the collection of cadavers revealed here in all their naked (and flayed) glory



The Écorchés

The Anatomical Masterworks of Honoré Fragonard

Christophe Degueurce

Blast Books 2011
Hb, 160pp, illus, £29.99/$50.00, ISBN 9780922233397
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £29.99

For someone who left no written records of a decade in his busy career, anatomist Honoré Fragonard left quite a legacy. His collection at the veterinary school at Alfort was the first great collection of comparative anatomy in France and became renowned around the world. Though they are only a fraction of the animal and human specimens he prepared during his lifetime, 21 flayed and preserved cadavers – *écorchés* – have survived the more than 200 years since they were embalmed and posed. The most recent threat to their survival was the heatwave that swept France in the summer of 2003, causing the vascular injections to begin melting and drip onto the floor of display cases. Details like this and the fact that sometimes he replaced eyes with porcelain and other times reinflated them make this a colourful book for more than just the plentiful illustrations.

The work of Honoré Fragonard could not have differed more from that of his cousin, Rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard, whose output would never have been featured on an episode of *The Mummy Road Show*. In addition to converting cadavers to mummies, 'our' Fragonard appraised cabinets of curiosity assembled by individuals and institutions, collections that were the rage in the 18th century. All the while he was creating his own artful *écorchés*, which involved bathing, shaving, injecting, skinning, dissecting, soaking, posing, drying, colouring and varnishing the dead.

To all who inquired about the collection, Fragonard replied, "Come and see". And they did, including German doctor Georg Ludwig Rumpelt, whose critical 1779 comment could as easily have been directed at Günther von Hagens's plastinates: "No preparation, even executed with the greatest care, holds to me any value if it does not demonstrate a new fact or the resolution of a debated issue. All their preparations, collected in the cabinet, satisfy only the gaze; few among them serve to demonstrate any new truths, to refute old errors; the refinements throughout are not instructive and demonstrate only the handiwork of their creator."

But for von Hagens, who pays him homage, and the Christophe Degueurce who curates his specimens, Fragonard was "an anatomist of genius, a practitioner unequalled".

Despite his talents, Fragonard was fired from his most notable job for being a madman. He wanted to start a national anatomy collection like the one John Hunter had willed to England, but France's national assembly shot down that idea. Nevertheless, Fragonard's legacy remains intact, most notably for his 'Horse and Rider'. The author offers up some details and dispels some myths about this head-turning dissection. The specimen was prepared by Fragonard (and not one of his students), and he refutes the idea that it was intended to illustrate a horseman of the apocalypse. The rider originally held reins and a whip, but the props vanished in the 1950s. It was rumoured during Fragonard's time that the human body was that of a local grocer's daughter who had died shortly before the preparation was revealed, but the author points out that the span between her death and the unveiling of the specimen did not allow sufficient time for embalming. In addition – and perhaps more convincing! – is the fact that the rider is male.

The book is relatively thin, but contains more information about Fragonard than I knew existed (and certainly more than I had access to when I saw the *écorchés* in 1999). An essay by Laure Cadot, "Yesterday and Today: From Écorchés to Plastinates", stands Fragonard's preparations side-by-side with those of today's premier anatomist (whose plastinated corpses I've seen and compared to his predecessors'). With full-page colour photos and large details of the same, the specimens are presented with the same pride that the 18th-century anatomist showed in preparing them.

Several adult and fœtal human preparations and dozens of animal specimens and skeletons survive at the Fragonard Museum in Alfort, France. So if you should happen to be going to France, consider this a guidebook and "come and see".

Christine Quigley

Fortean Times Verdict
GUIDEBOOK TO THE LEGACY OF AN ANATOMIST OF GENIUS **10**

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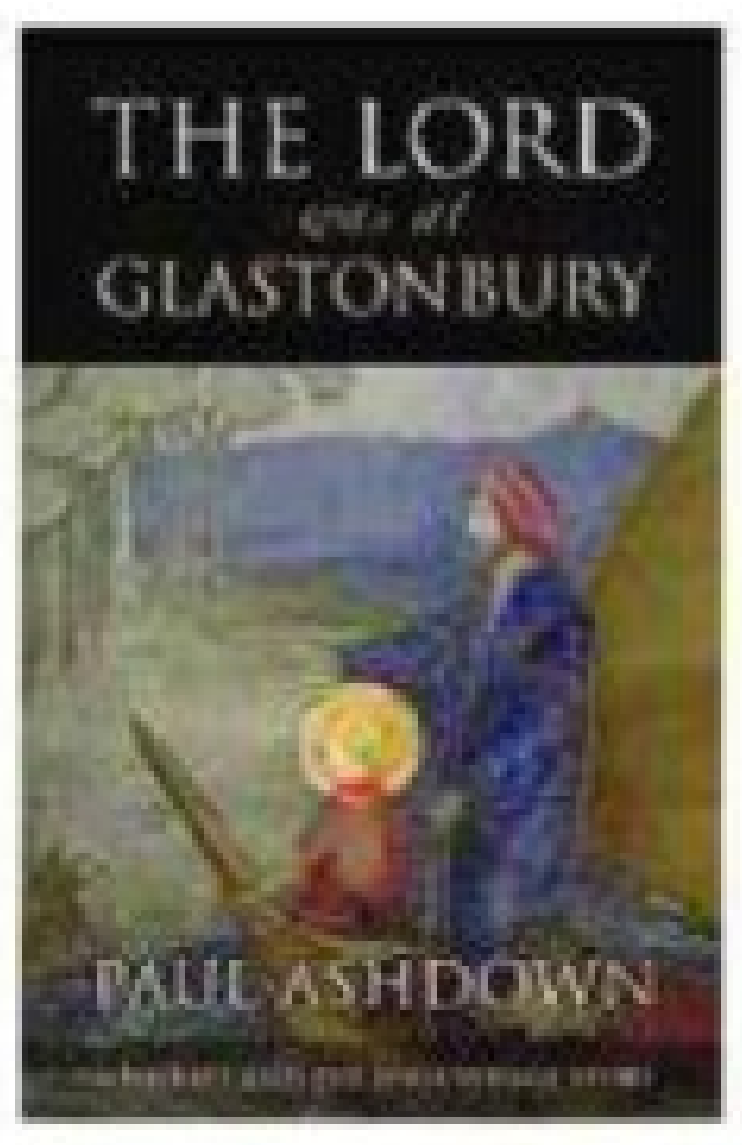
Jesus was not a Glasto visitor, concludes a solid study of the Jesus in Britain story



The Lord was at Glastonbury

Somerset and the Jesus Voyage Story

Paul Ashdown

Squeeze Press 2011
Pb, 344pp, illus, bib, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9781906069087
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £9.49

The legend is inspiring: as a boy, Jesus sailed to Britain with His uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, who was in the tin trade. The problem comes when people treat the legend as history. Half way through *The Lord was at Glastonbury*, Paul Ashdown quotes from a 1939 booklet, *Glastonbury – Truth and Fiction*: "We should have no quarrel with any one who honestly attempted to trace the history of this or any legend simply as a legend, but we must resolutely oppose any attempt to convert fancy into fact, by means or methods which, if not wantonly dishonest, are at any rate slipshod and unsound… Such well-meaning and misguided writing may do much mischief…"

This is exactly the stance of this book. It is a joy to read a book on this legend which distinguishes between legend and history, fancy and fact. Ashdown traces the story that Jesus visited Britain with His Uncle Joe back to its earliest known occurrence – 1895 – and explores just about every published variant on it in the century since, showing how the story grows – to the point where the child Jesus attends Druid school!

This relatively recent story is actually a merger of two strands of tradition, he says: the old legend that Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain to trade in tin, and an early story that the first church at Glastonbury was consecrated to his mother's memory by Jesus himself. On this pious tale, Ashdown quotes Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, who wrote in 1685 that any who believe this "are past all confutation by reason, having their minds naturally framed to believe legends". The merging of these stories also fits in nicely with the late-19th/early-20th-century belief in British-Israelism, that Britain is the true heir to the promises God made to the Hebrew people. Ashdown spends time on that classic piece of "evidence" that Jesus trod this land, Blake's verses beginning: "And did those feet in ancient times / Walk upon England's mountains green?". Blake has been ill-served by those imposing on him beliefs he certainly never held, says the author.

It is clear from Blake's other work that he was speaking metaphorically about the risen, reigning Christ, not about a physical teenage boy. In the poem 'Jerusalem', a quite different poem from 'Milton' in which the famous lines appear, Blake wrote: "Our souls exult, & London's towers / Receive the Lamb of God to dwell / In England's green & pleasant bowers". It is "the cosmic Christ", Christ Pantocrator, "not the Jesus of history, of whom Blake writes," he says.

This splendid book has to be the ultimate statement on the Jesus-voyage myth; any future books asserting the historicity of the story will have to deal with its arguments before putting forward their own. But many who "convert fancy into fact" with slipshod arguments are True Believers; and like any fundamentalists they are beyond reasonable argument.

David V Barrett

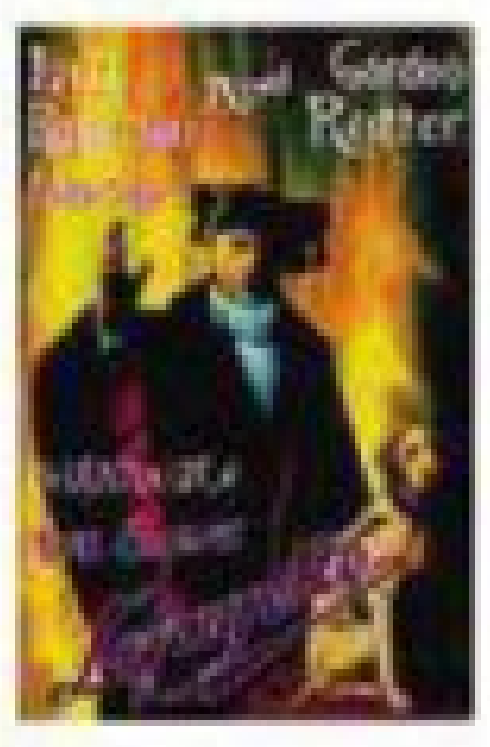
Fortean Times Verdict

SUPERB DECONSTRUCTION OF THE JESUS IN BRITAIN LEGEND **9**

The Death and Life of the Great Lafayette

Ian Robertson and Gordon Rutter

New Lands Press 2011
Pb, 100pp, illus, ind, £10.00, ISBN 9780956870100
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.00



The inversion of the normal order of 'life and death' in the title is an acknowledgement that Sigmund Neuberger – The Great Lafayette – is better known today, if known at all, for the circumstances surrounding his demise than for his achievements. Yet in his lifetime he was fêted as a performer, and Ian Robertson and Gordon Rutter have pulled together an affectionate portrait to commemorate both his life and his untimely death.

Born, probably in Munich, in 1871, the young Sigmund made his way to the United States where he immersed himself in Vaudeville during the early 1890s, honing his skills as an archer and quick-change artiste. After a few false starts, his career as an illusionist took off, though it would seem he used his powers of showmanship to compensate, more than adequately, for deficiencies in his technical abilities.

Having changed his name by deed poll to Lafayette, he settled in London in 1903, while continuing to tour. This made him enormously rich, earning him in the region of £40,000 in 1910, although out of his income he had to support an extensive entourage.

Robertson and Rutter sketch what is known of his life and describe his acts, including his set pieces, notably The Lion's Bride and the propagandistic Dr Kremser: Vivisectionist. They also provide a sense of the magic scene within which Lafayette operated in the first decade of the 20th century.

Harry Houdini was a friend, and at a low point in Lafayette's life in 1899 Houdini gave him a dog, which Lafayette called Beauty. It was love at first sight, and Beauty became his constant companion. Clearly an intelligent hound, she was an integral part of the show, and Lafayette claimed that half his income was actually earned by her.

At the beginning of May 1911, Lafayette began a two-week run at the Empire Palace Theatre in Edinburgh. A few days later, Beauty died, leaving him grief-stricken. He said his life was over without her but, ever the trouper, he continued the run. As it transpired, he did not long outlive the dog, himself dying, along with a number of his company and his horse and a lion, when fire broke out on stage in the theatre on 9 May.

Lafayette's body was cremated and his ashes placed with Beauty's embalmed corpse in an oak casket. Their joint funeral was an extravagant affair which jammed the streets of Edinburgh as they made their final journey to Piershill Cemetery.

The authors draw out the strengths and eccentricities of Lafayette's personality as well as the contradictions, such as his love of his dogs and opposition to vivisection (and he would have survived the fire if he had not re-entered the theatre to try to rescue his horse), yet his seeming indifference to complaints that the lion was made to roar on cue by means of electric shocks.

The book is well illustrated and is an entertaining read. Something seems to have gone awry with the production: sections of text are repeated, perhaps a result of rushing to meet the centenary publication deadline; but this does not overly detract from an enjoyable study of a great character. New Lands Press specialise, as the name suggests, in books of a fortean nature. *The Great Lafayette* is their first production, and it is to be hoped that more will follow.

Tom Ruffles

Fortean Times Verdict

A LIVELY LOOK AT A GREAT SHOWMAN AND DOG-LOVER **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

TUNING IN

David Thomas and Matthiew Klinck

Hampton Roads Publishing (hrpub.com) 2011
Hb, pp219, £19.99
ISBN 9781571746467

Thomas made a documentary for US television about trance channelling. He and Klinck (his cameraman) followed six established mediums and filmed an in-depth session and interview with each one's spirit guide. This is his uncritical account of the project. A new convert to the 'world of spirit', Thomas gives no proofs, only the testimony of the 'spirit guides' who have names like Chief Joseph, Kryon, and The Pleiadian Collective, including one from a UFO and another an angel who lived "in the days of Atlantis and Lemuria". Thomas is openly motivated by his own spiritual experiences which begin with a bird landing nearby and looking at him: "Our eyes met... something welled up inside me... I knew that I wasn't alone". Although he claims to address the sceptics, they are unlikely to be impressed. These ethereal teachers seem to gush platitudes about karma, reincarnation and what happens at death all too familiar to anyone who has read much Eastern mysticism and Theosophy-influenced New Age literature. Moving on to UFOs, global warming and 'higher frequencies', these 'entities' seem fond of describing us incarnate beings as 'humans', almost as if they weren't. Basically, it's the old spiritualist message (that doesn't necessarily mean its worthless) breathlessly retold for the Internet-savvy generation. If you can't believe all this, the angelic advice is to "open up".

THE HAUNTING OF WILLINGTON MILL

Michael J Hallowell & Darren W Ritson

History Press (thehistorypress.co.uk) 2011
Pb, pp240, bib, illus, £9.99
ISBN 9780752458786

In his introduction, Colin Wilson bemoans the general lack of awareness of many Victorian writers who once were as famous as Dickens and Thackeray. One of those was very widely followed indeed: Catherine Crowe, whom some of us still celebrate for her landmark 1848 study of contemporary folklore, *The Night Side of Nature*. The authors dedicate this book to Mrs Crowe, in particular because hers was the first intelligent analysis of the story of the haunting of Willington Mill, one of the most famous cases of the period. For several decades in the mid-1800s, this old Tyneside flour mill was the location of a series of strange phenomena, including apparitions of people, weird creatures, poltergeist activity and murders. Through a model of diligent research, the authors chronicle the events using an impressive array of local sources; and more, they delve further back in time, to 1665, when a reputed witch lived and died, unconfessed, on the site of the mill. From the time of the first mill – built where her cottage stood, in about 1760, it being replaced by a steam mill in 1800 – the area gained a reputation for being haunted. The authors even claim to identify the witch. Highly recommended.

HAUNTED SKIES VOL 2

John Hanson & Dawn Holloway

CFZ Press (cfz.org.uk) 2011
Pb, pp300, index, illus, £14.99
ISBN 9781905723478

Jon Downes's hyperactive CFZ Press launched its 'Fortean Words' imprint to publish works outside its speciality of cryptozoology, and began with this copiously illustrated and ambitious series of mainly British UFO reports and investigations by the authors. Volume One began with the years 1940–1959, a period of great interest as the UFO phenomenon was in its infancy and to some extent reflected the great sociological changes of the post-war decade. This second volume covers the period 1960–1965. This is more an annotated chronology than the advertised 'encyclopædia', and Hanson, a retired policeman, and his partner Holloway, are impressively thorough with their reports from contemporary case files, news clippings, photographs and commissioned illustrations (from David Sankey and Wayne Mason).

PREHISTORIC BRITAIN

Robert John Langdon

ABC Publishing (abc-publishing-group.co.uk) 2010
Pb, pp203, index, bib, illus, £14.99
ISBN 9781907979019

Despite its modest title, this surprising little gem contains much that is challenging to the orthodox view of prehistory and geology. Langdon, a fully accredited but self-professed maverick archæologist, proposes that during the last Great Ice Age – some 12,000 years ago – the land we know as Britain was pressed half a mile (800m) below sea level by two vertical miles (3.2km) of sea and ice. When that melted, the land was not the familiar shape we now know but, because of a different sea level, formed a great archipelago of islands. Among its waterways, Mesolithic man evolved a sophisticated 'boat society', constructing long barrows and megaliths as 'signposts' (many pointing to Stonehenge), some built as much as 5,000 years earlier than currently dated. He also argued that they had good medical and scientific knowledge and traded as far as the Mediterranean. Well-argued and full of colour illustrations, and with a timeline chronology.

FORTEAN FICTION

Songs of the Earth: The Wild Hunt Book One

Elspeth Cooper

Gollancz, 2011
Hb, pp480, £18.99
ISBN 9780575096141

Gair is under sentence of death, banished from the Holy City because of his ability to tap into 'the song', a magical inner sound world capable of awesome power. Out on his musical ear, with Church Knights and a witchfinder on his tail, Gair discovers allies for his dangerous ability among the Guardians of the Veil. Guided by the wise old head of Aldaran, he makes his incident-packed way to the Western Isles and the Guardians' stronghold of Chapterhouse. Here, danger laps ever closer in the form of the sinister Savin; while the Hidden Kingdom, for centuries kept at bay by the Veil, gnaws threateningly at the edges of the world.

By the time the book gets to Chapterhouse, I was afraid Cooper was going to go all *Harry Potter* on us. Mercifully, she doesn't. This is assured writing, containing undoubtedly familiar fantasy tropes, but palpably adult and without lazy recourse to heroic fantasy's predominant trend of one-upmanship in grit, expletives and relentless graphic violence. The novel possesses a compelling, action-packed narrative sweep all its own, an emotional catharsis at once shocking and convincing, and one of the most unsentimental, yet tender, erotic romances to grace the genre. Aptly for a debut novel entitled *Songs of the Earth*, Cooper demonstrates a refined ear, crafting her tale to its explosive climax with a fluency and flair that goes beyond seeing words as mere cogs in a story machine.

Some writers inspire a real sense of faith in their readers from the start, and this is just what Cooper achieves with this impressive first effort. Roll on Book Two!

Nick Čirkovič

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:
THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

Conan the Barbarian

Dir John Milius, US 1982
Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, £15.99

This first cinematic foray into Robert E Howard's extensive œuvre was born out of the unstoppable rise of heroic fantasy through the 1970s and the then-recent success of *Star Wars* on the big screen, which had demonstrated that putting a modern sheen on mythic Campbellian narratives was a valid – and phenomenally profitable – way of resuscitating the cinema of high adventure that had long died out in Hollywood. Howard's distant Hyborian Age – post-Atlantis, but some millennia before recorded history – was a product of the same *Weird Tales* milieu that had introduced readers to Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos and Clark Ashton Smith's tales of Zothique (the three kept up a keen correspondence). It was just one of the 'lost worlds' that populated this golden age of pulp fiction, but the character created by REH to bestride this rich mash-up of history, magic and myth was unforgettable: Conan, whose picaresque progress from orphaned Cimmerian slave to Aquilonian king was loosely charted over a series of stories.

Conan enjoyed a rich afterlife beyond Howard's wildest dreams, living on in books, and particularly comics, for decades after his creator's tragic early suicide in 1936. By the late 1970s, a film was inevitable and a screenplay – by none other than Oliver Stone – was doing the rounds. It was snapped up by Dino De Laurentiis and handed to *Apocalypse Now* writer John Milius for a money-saving script makeover (out went the hordes of impossible pre-CGI mutants) and directorial duties. The film emerged in 1982, cementing the reputation of one brawny legend and effectively launching the screen career of another: Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose subsequent progress proved as unstoppable as had Conan's.

What's perhaps surprising is how good the movie is 30 years on. It certainly looks handsome on this new Blu-ray release; a resolutely old-fashioned visual treat, classically composed, elegantly designed and effectively shot. If there are more swords than sorcery on display, then this lends the proceedings a pleasing grittiness that sits well with the film's themes. Schwarzenegger is perfectly cast; sure, he can't act as such – not in the sense of being able to deliver intelligible dialogue in a meaningful fashion – but that's almost beside the point; rather than offering mere 'acting', Arnie *embodies* Conan. After all, was anyone else even the right shape to play a savage Hyborian Age warrior? He's a compelling physical presence, but as well as the sheer brute heft required he brings something else to the part; as Michael Moorcock points out in one of the many (very good) extras, Arnie makes us believe in Conan's "barbarian patience", the slow-burning motor behind Milius's tale of a long-awaited revenge exacted on the murderers of the young Cimmerian's parents. Arnie broods beautifully, and Milius wisely holds back on complicated dialogue in favour of a solidly visual approach to storytelling and characterisation.

If it's acting you want, then you can sit back and enjoy James Earl Jones's splendid baddie Thulsa Doom (the memorable moniker is imported from REH's Kull stories; the character is based on Thoth-Amon, servant of the snake god). In an appealingly fortean bit of lexi-linking, James Jones becomes a Hyborean age version of Jim Jones, exhorting his deluded, long-haired, flower-child followers to commit mass suicide in the hope of transcendence. He's the perfect foil for Arnie's Conan – snake oil and weasel words against muscle and steel – and their conflict an echo of the film's greater theme: that of a knowingly Wagnerian *Götterdämmerung* in which Conan is the representative of a new race of men who will stand proud (the occasional "Crom!" aside) without the help of the gods. When you open a film with a quote from Nietzsche, you'd better mean it – and what ultimately makes this *Conan* a winner is that Milius so clearly does.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
KNOW, O PRINCE, THAT CONAN STILL KICKS CONSIDERABLE ASS **9**

Evil Rising

Dir Antti-Jussi Annila, Finland/Czech Republic 2008
Matchbox Films, £15.99

A strong, intelligent chiller from Finnish director Antti-Jussi Annila, *Evil Rising* is a tale of guilt and dread that muddies psychological with supernatural terrors and has a grim, cold atmosphere that seeps into the bones.

In the dying days of the 16th century, at the end of a long war between Russia and Sweden, two brothers trudge the borderlands, marking a new line between the two powers and two faiths. Erik, twisted by age, war and his own brutality, and blind without his glasses (which, possibly not coincidentally, look a bit like those worn by Himmler), dominates his younger brother, Knut; but it is Knut who locks a peasant girl in a cellar to face a drawn-out, hideous death. The pair move on, meeting up with their Russian counterparts and striking out into a large swamp. As Knut starts seeing visions of the girl, and they come across a strange, unmapped village around an abandoned sauna, it becomes clear that a time of reckoning has begun.

Annila shoots in a leached-out palette of greys and browns; evil is filth. The brothers seek to purge themselves of their sins with fire and water, but still they are pursued, and increasingly they fail to see clearly as madness and terror distort the landscape. With commanding performances from the two brothers, and an insidious sense of menace, this is powerful, creeping horror. It deserves a better title.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
SINS CAN'T ALWAYS BE KEPT LOCKED AWAY IN A CELLAR **8**

Drive Angry

Dir Patrick Lussier, US 2011
Lions Gate, £10.99/£24.99

Season of the Witch

Dir Dominic Sena, US 2011
Momentum Pictures, £17.99/£19.99

Nic Cage is at his bonkers best in *Drive Angry*, the grindhouse throwback that Tarantino's *Death Proof* should have been, but wasn't. Cage is John Milton (you read right), a dead career criminal who breaks out of Hell to save his granddaughter from sacrifice by a Satanist cult (led by Billy Burke). On his tail, alternately hindering and helping him, is The Accountant, played by the wonderfully deadpan and debonair William Fitchner. All the ingredients are here: over-the-top violence, gratuitous nudity and sex (during gunfights, no less), and fast cars. Amber Heard provides leggy sex appeal as Cage's reluctant sidekick. It even comes in a ludicrous 3D version (on the Blu-ray) in which severed body parts fly every which way. It has a silly script, but the vehicular action and sheer exuberance of the piece overcomes that, if you're in the right mood.

Unfortunately, Cage is much more subdued in the Hammer wannabe *Season of the Witch* – much to the detriment of the movie. He stars alongside *Hellboy*'s Ron Perlman as a pair of deserting 12th-century knights who are given the task of transporting a suspected witch (Claire Foy) to her trial. The thrills are rather low-key as the entourage (including *Misfits*'s Robert Sheehan) are picked off one-by-one, and even a token appearance by a barely recognisable Christopher Lee fails to liven things up. All Hell breaks loose – literally – at the climax, but it is too late to make up for the rather plodding approach. At around just 90 minutes, this seems like a much longer film, and that's rarely a recommendation.
Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
GREAT 70S THROWBACK/ DULL HAMMER WANNABE **8/5**

The Dark Angel

Dir Peter Hammond, UK 1987
Network DVD, £9.99

Peter O'Toole stars as rake, wastrel and opium fiend Uncle Silas in this bold adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's Victorian masterpiece.

After her father's unexpected death, young Maud Ruthyn (Beatie Edney) becomes heiress to a large fortune that is held in trust for her until she comes of age. Coming of age happens sooner than she might have wished for, however. Having fallen for a youthful, Byronic painting of her Uncle Silas, she agrees to being placed in his care – despite warnings from other relatives.

After her arrival in Silas's crumbling mansion, she quickly realises that he no longer resembles the fresh-faced hero of the painting. His debauched lifestyle and drug addiction have made him unpredictable and played havoc with his once radiant looks. Occasional psychotic outbursts aside, he displays a benevolent demeanour towards Maud, who realises too late that her uncle's façade conceals a web of deception and terror.

In on the plot is mad old bat Madame de la Rougiere (Jean Lapotaire; think a bizarre hybrid of Siouxsie Sioux and Lene Lovich in their sixties), a French governess initially hired by Maud's father and – unbeknownst to him – also a drug addict. As if this weren't enough, Silas's son Dudley also returns, and eventually Maud comes to realise that a sinister conspiracy is about to deprive her of all that's dear and important to her.

Apart from Mme de la Rougiere's full-on gothic eccentric, the imagery and costumes go for late Georgian splendour rather then gloomy Victoriana. However, it's not just the sumptuous set designs and costumes that stray from the original novel. Director Peter Hammond (*Sherlock Holmes*, *The Avengers*) infuses the plot with so much S/M imagery, erotica, hallucinogenic visions and gruesome murder that Le Fanu's gothic drama is turned into pure grand guignol, occasionally bordering on the downright silly.

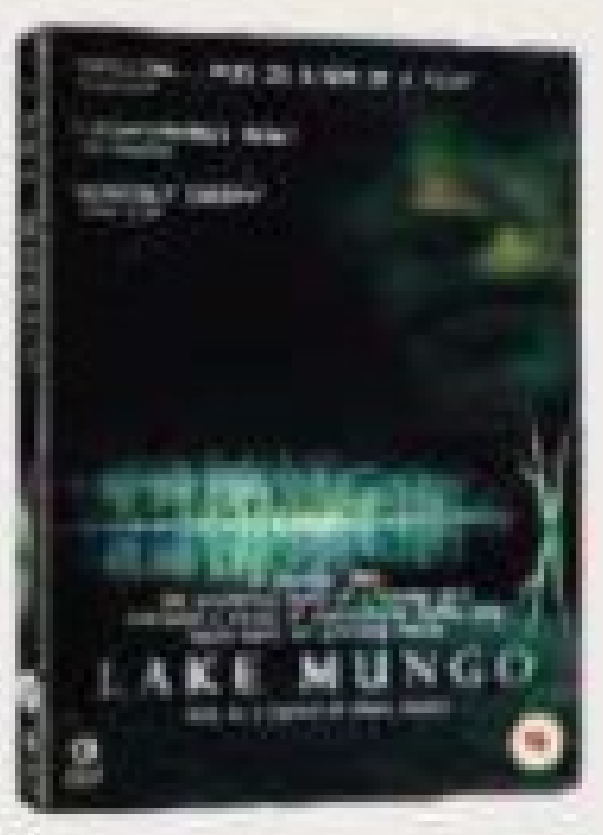
The Dark Angel is no doubt an unusual take on a literary classic, sporting a stellar cast that also includes Hammer Horror doyenne Barbara Shelley in the role of cousin Monica and Guy Rolfe as Dr Bryerly; however, watching three hours of laudanum-induced demented antics by O'Toole and Lapatoire makes you want to knock back some opiates yourself. Network DVD present the BBC-drama as a single disc containing all three episodes uncut, rather than the edited version shown in the American PBS *Mystery!* series and previously released on VHS in the USA.
Claudia Andrei

Fortean Times Verdict
LE FANU ON LAUDANUM? RARE BBC GOTHIC REVIVED **7**

SHORTS

LAKE MUNGO

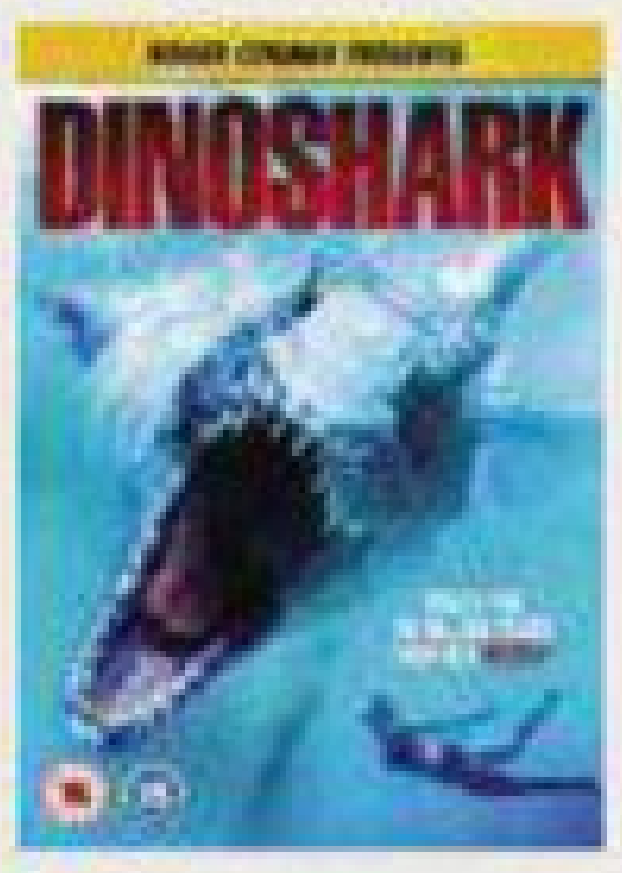
(Second Sight, £15.99)



This inherently spooky Australian movie has been drawing favourable comparisons with (and has obvious similarities to) *Paranormal Activity* and *The Blair Witch Project*. Perhaps let down by a lack of emotive acting (or is it an accurate portrayal of the grieving Aussie male?), it suggests that the fake-documentary format actually requires greater capabilities from its protagonists, as the disbelief we're expected to suspend is actually greater than in an obviously fictitious work. It's a slow-burner of a film, taking at least one third of its running time before anything much happens. There's also an over-dependence on earnest 'talking heads', sometimes making it feel as if director Joel Anderson is about to lapse into Chris Morris-style pastiche. One notable, and somewhat strange, motif is *Lake Mungo*'s indebtedness to *Twin Peaks*. We first meet our leading (young) lady, Alice Palmer, as she's being zipped-up in a body bag, having drowned in the river. Through flashbacks, we gain insights into her character and the web of unhealthy sexual relations she'd been involved in. If I were David Lynch I'd be demanding a script credit… **Tim Weinberg** **6/10**

DINOSHARK

(Anchor Bay Entertainment, £9.99)

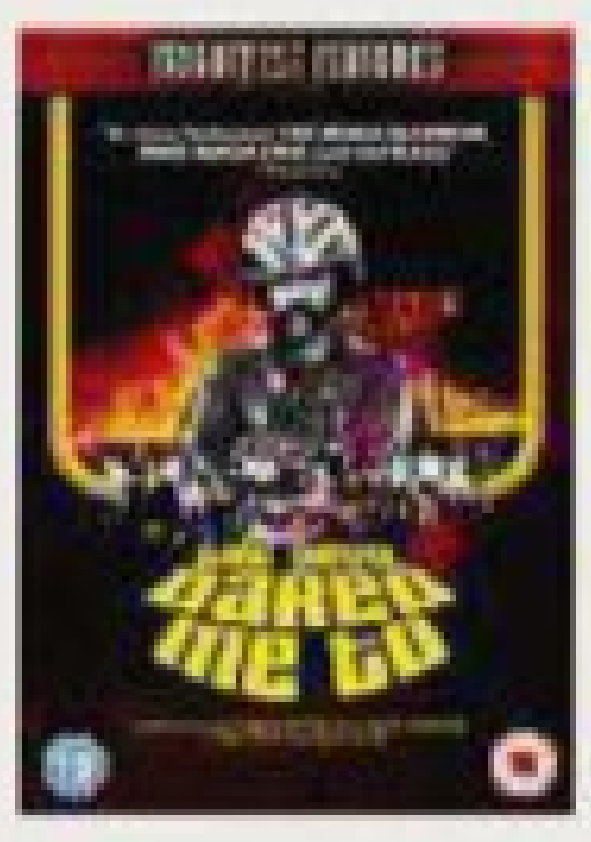


Did you swoon over *Sharktopus* or maybe dig *Dinocroc* (no relation)? No? Me neither, as I'd been labouring in ignorance as to the existence of these gems (and you know what they say about that aforementioned attribute and bliss?). Well, I'm already nostalgic for a time when I *didn't* know these movies existed. Roger Corman's production credit will no doubt get B-movie buffs excited, but *Dinoshark* is a rather toothless (ahem) romp with the titular monster looking like the theme-park ride version of himself: i.e. a crap, mechanical shark.

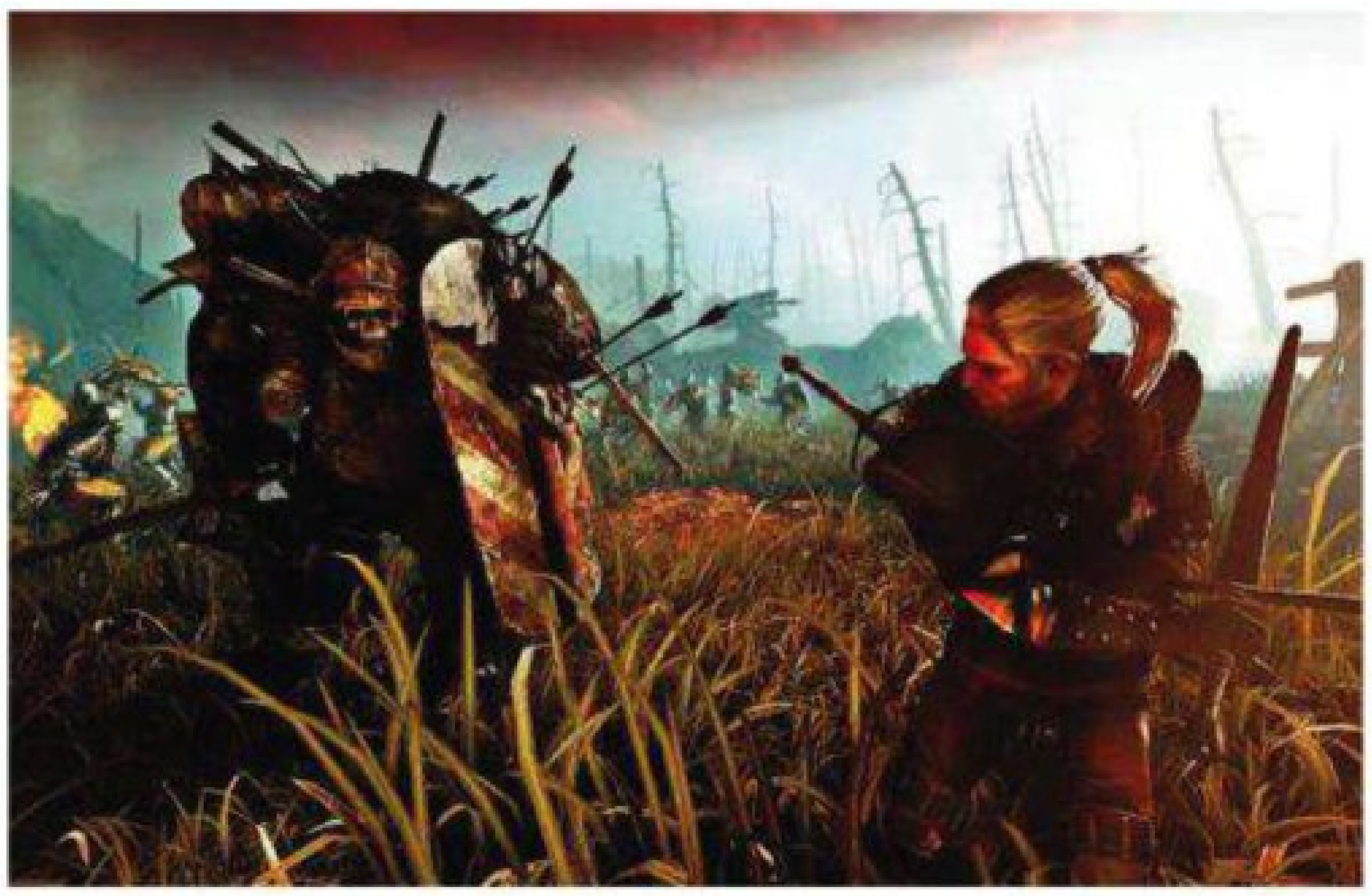
Woken from his 150 million-year, icy slumber (all due to global warming), Dinoshark reeks havoc in a manner similar to his fellow eco-warrior Godzilla and is somehow given a karmic mission, albeit more twisted and green than the lovechild of Kermit the Frog and the Incredible Hulk. In its favour, there's an all-girl water polo tournament and the further throwaway sexism of "a sexy science teacher combining beauty and brains in one very unlikely package". But being able to read a script while pouting a lot doesn't necessarily make one a convincing scientist. And the production as a whole isn't even bad enough to be good in any sort of skewed, ironic way. **TW** **3/10**

THE DEVIL DARED ME TO

(Entertainment One, £9.99)



Unknown outside of his own country, Randy Cambell is New Zealand's answer to Evel Knievel, with less fame, money or talent but a propensity for worse injuries. His ambition is to jump Auckland Harbour in a jet-car (0–500 in 2.5 seconds), while his team (the Te Puke Hellriders) are on a mission to bring their death-defying act to North Island. But have they all, unwittingly, made a pact with the Devil? If your taste in humour is purely visual and visceral and runs to compound fractures, immolation, accidents involving broken glass, dismemberment and castration, then you'll find plenty to laugh about, albeit in a cross-legged, wincing sort of way (The leg-resetting scene is especially sublime in its set-up). Chris Stapp's film is so puerile as to make the average Will Ferrell vehicle appear almost as profound as *Raging Bull*; it had me crying with laughter. **TW** **7/10**



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings

PC £34.99 Namco Bandai

Not only is *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* a stunning gaming experience, but it shares many of the best traits of some of the finest fantasy novels. As a role-playing game it has novelistic pretensions, but with the added interactive element that the best choices-and-consequences style RPG can muster. Plunging right into the fray, our outcast, morally vacillating, opportunistic Geralt is in the thick of it as part of King Foltest's siege force; the sheer variety of incident is admirably matched by the gorgeous depth of field contained in the game's fabulously rendered backdrops. With a tumultuous cast of characters impinging upon the story, labyrinthine conspiracies and narrative flashbacks to negotiate your way through, a copious array of side quests – some of which can have major consequences regarding the direction in which the story leads – this is a game that can pose a serious threat to any long-standing relationship given its immersive temptations.

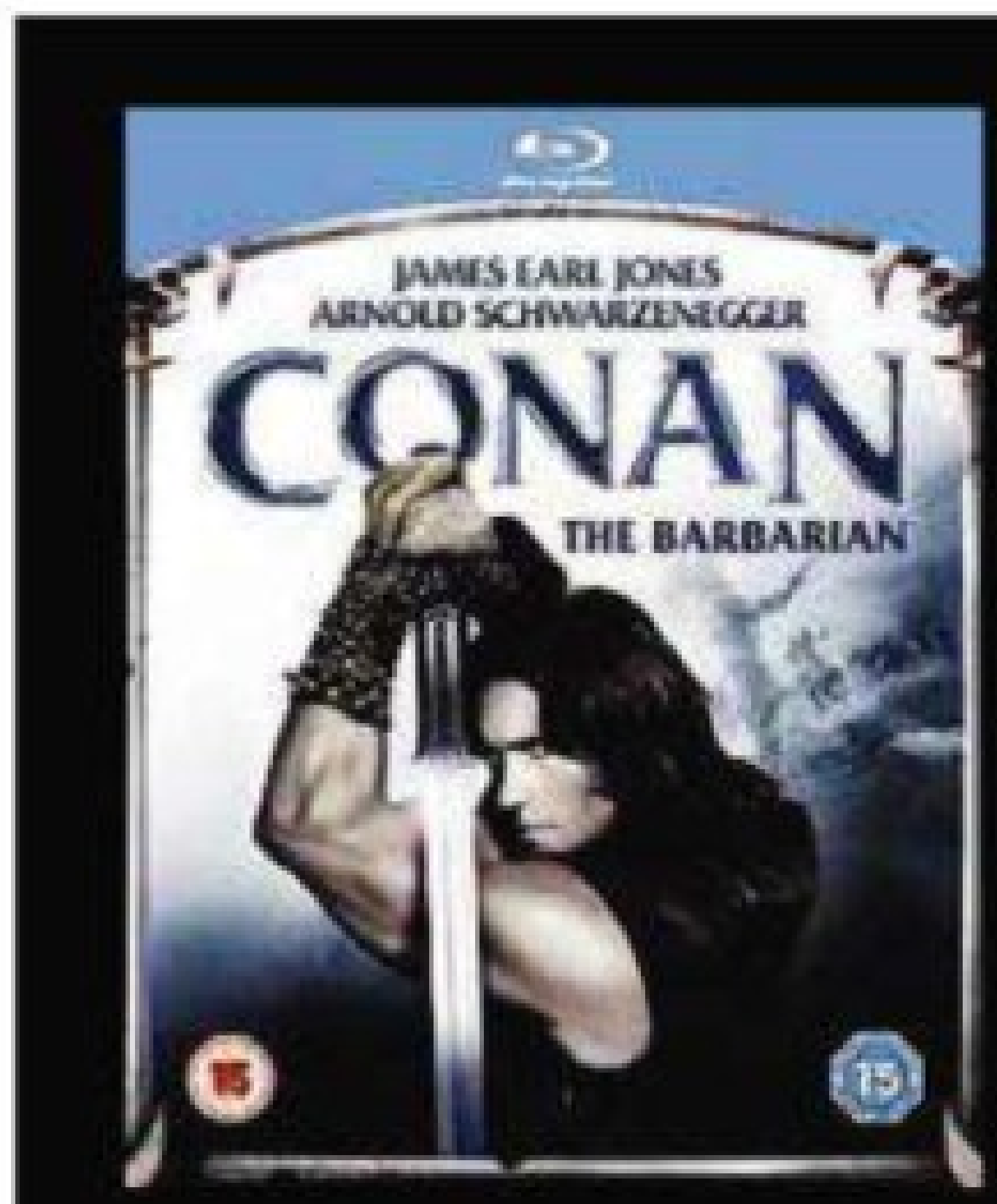
Within Geralt's own upgradeable abilities there is ample space for development, whether enhancing his alchemical, magical or combat traits. True, here as elsewhere, you can hit upon a repetitive method and basically stick with it, which perhaps says as much about the character of the gamer as it does the customisation potential of Geralt. But for those with time and obsession, you can spin out variations of battle moves, method and character enhancement to your heart's content. Which brings us to a negative: sword combat, even with dual blades is still relatively clunky. OK, we're not talking *Morrowind*, but it still doesn't get much more sophisticated than frantic L&R mouse tapping, despite the wonderful character motion flow that provides a compelling distraction from the problem.

Given the source material from which it comes – Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* books, which for fantasy tomes are models of brevity – *Witcher 2* is ironically akin to some of the fantasy mega-series out there, in which ambition eventually outstrips achievement. Like them, if you create a huge labyrinth you are in danger of getting lost in it, resulting in a somewhat hasty ending and more loose ends than a tattered mediæval tapestry. But, you know what? It doesn't matter, because *Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* is 90 per cent pure Mithril masterpiece. I actually wonder whether we will see its like again on PC. Polish-based developers CDProjekt show the sort of dedication and attention to detail that seems positively heroic in its refusal to submit to mass market tailoring of the dominant never-mind-the-quality-just-get-online philosophy. Quality is everything here, including the wonderfully detailed game guide. Add to that an assiduous concern with patches to enhance performance and the availability of downloadable content and we are offered an exceptional experience which more than repays the time invested in it. A superhuman achievement for a game in which it is easy to forget that its makers are only human, after all.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

BLOODY, BEWITCHING AND QUITE BRILLIANT GAMING EXPERIENCE **9**



WIN! CONAN THE BARBARIAN ON BLU-RAY

The film that brought Robert E Howard's most famous creation to the screen and made Arnold Schwarzenegger an international star comes to Blu-ray for the first time. Packed with extras, including interviews not seen since 1982, this is the definitive edition of a sword and sorcery classic. Conan the Barbarian is available from 11 July at RRP £15.99).

Thanks to 20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT we have FIVE copies of CONAN THE BARBARIAN on Blu-ray to give away.

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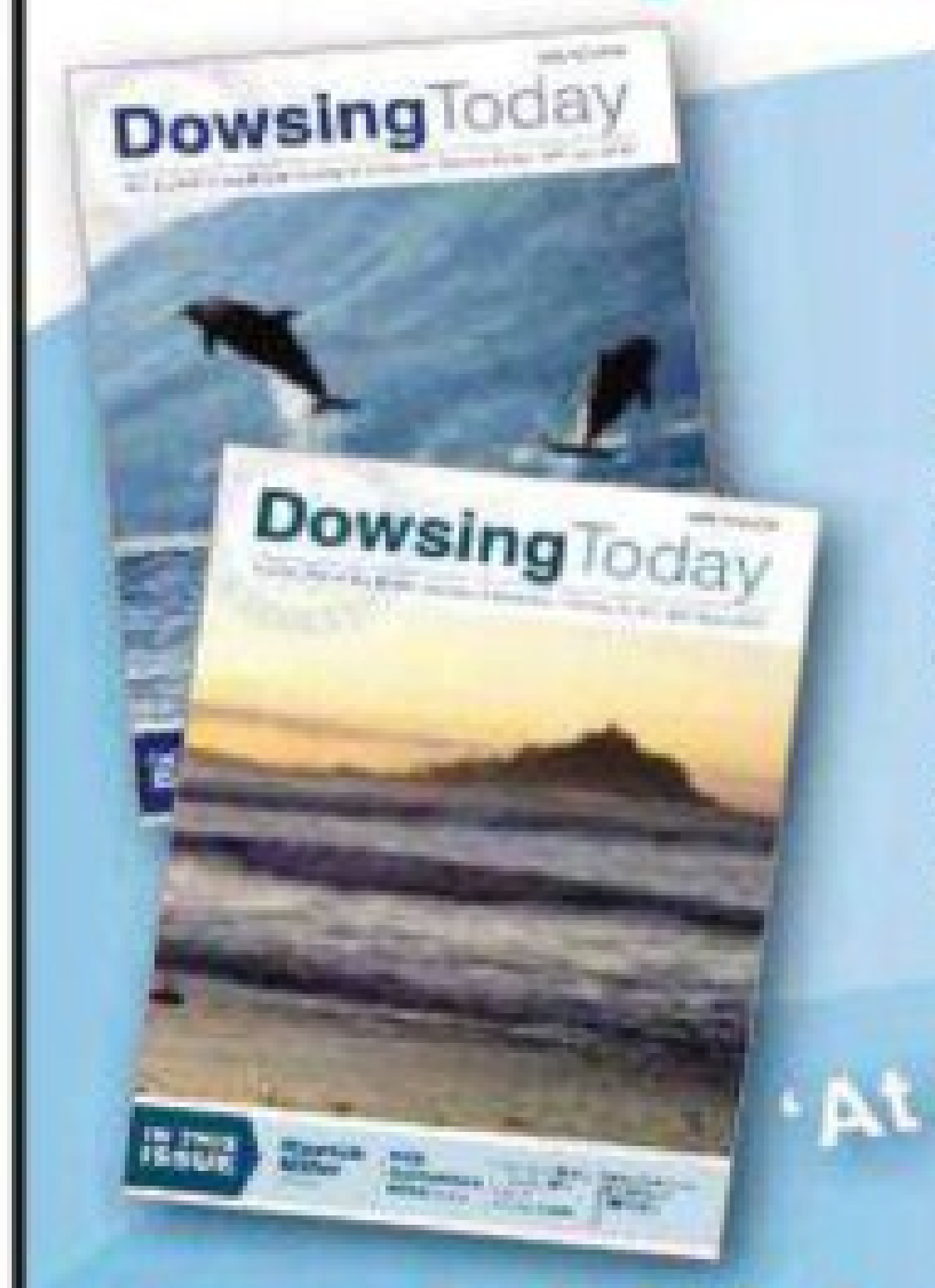

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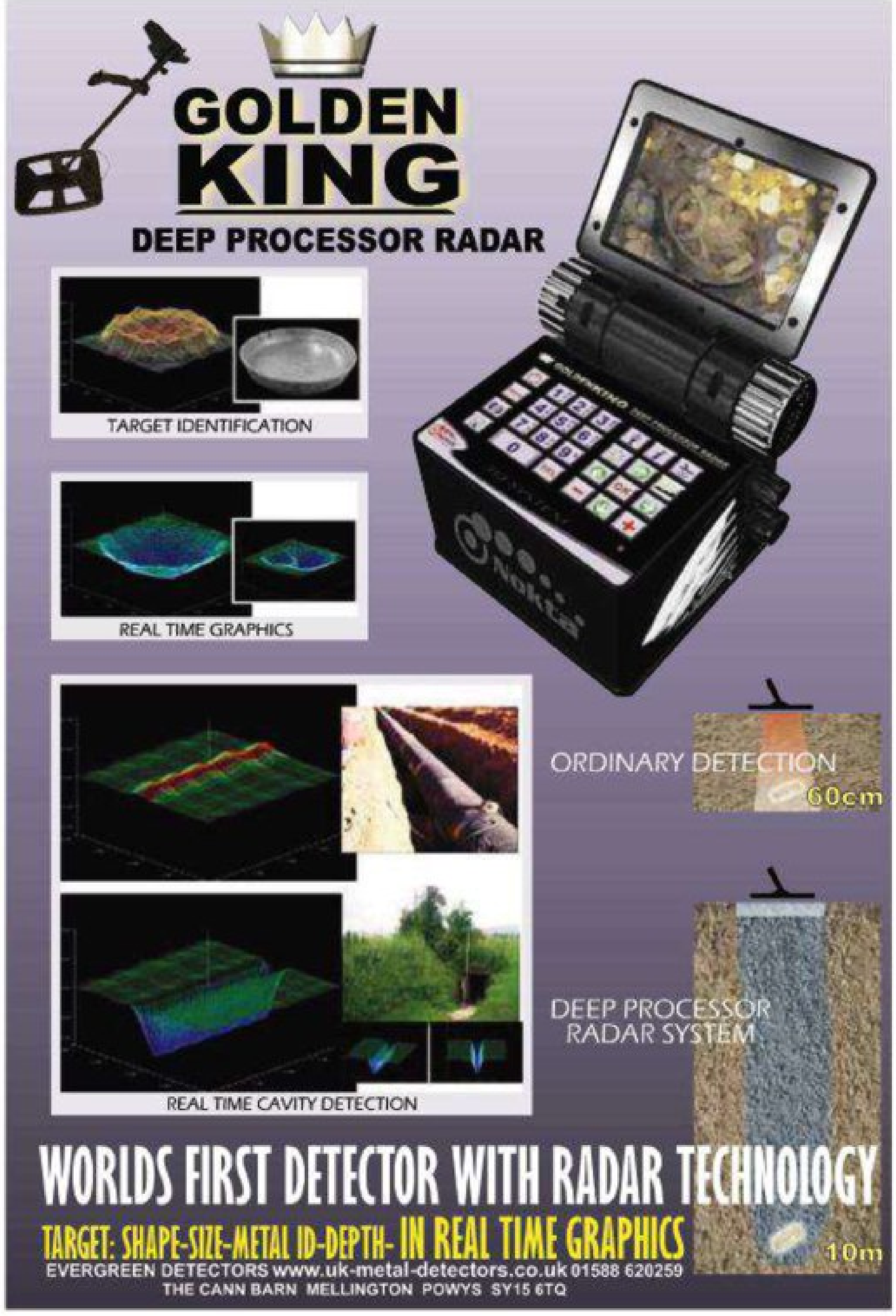

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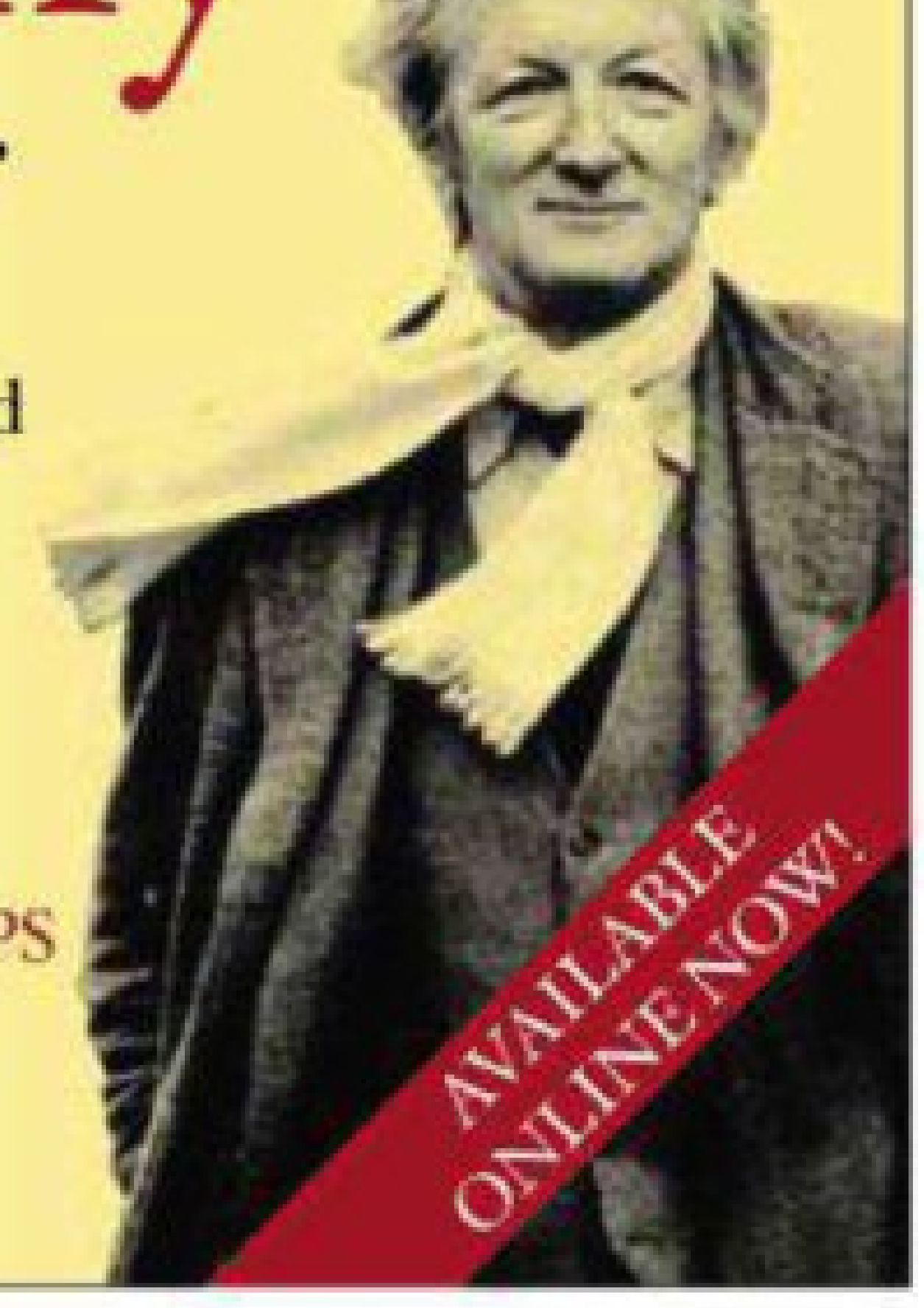
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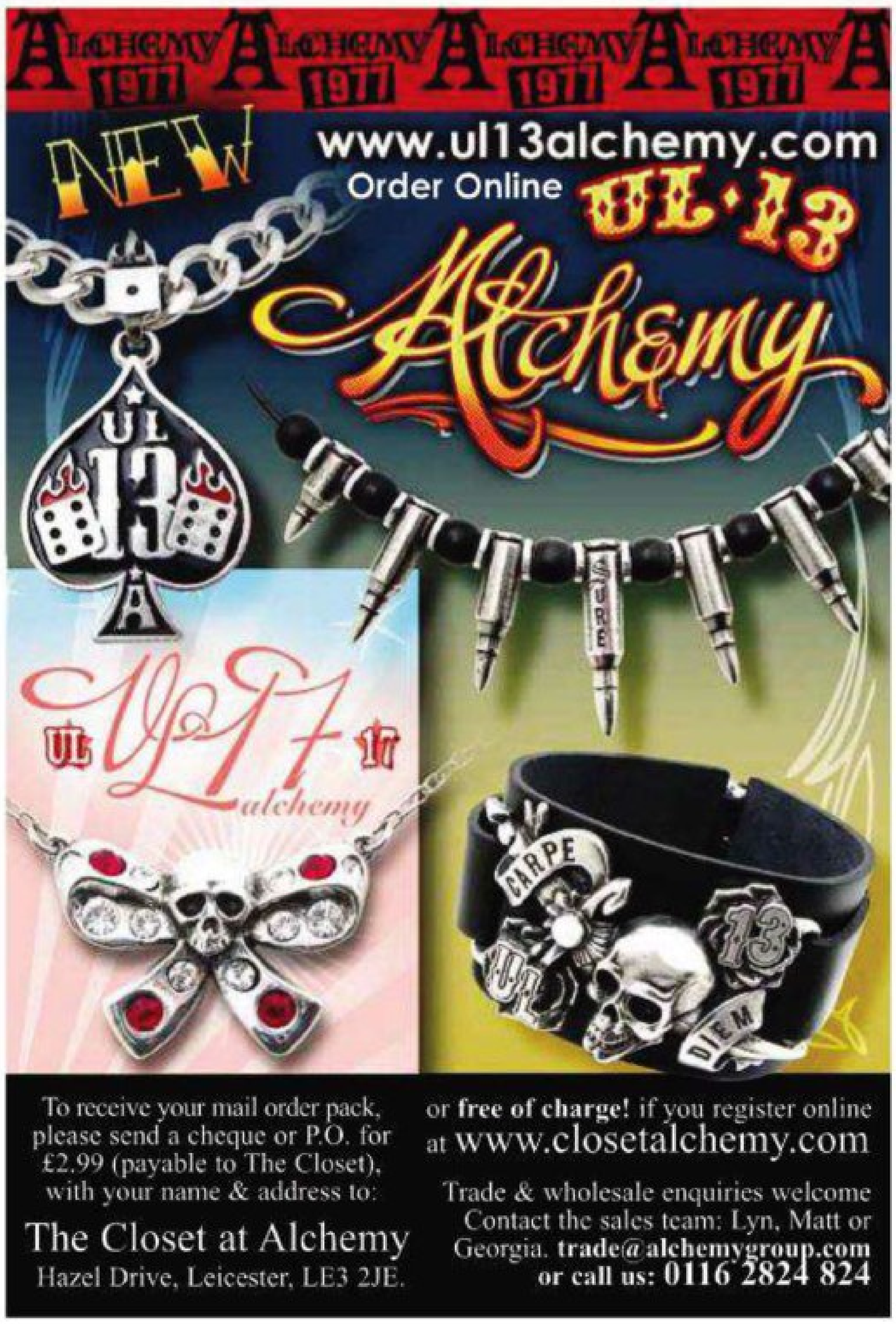
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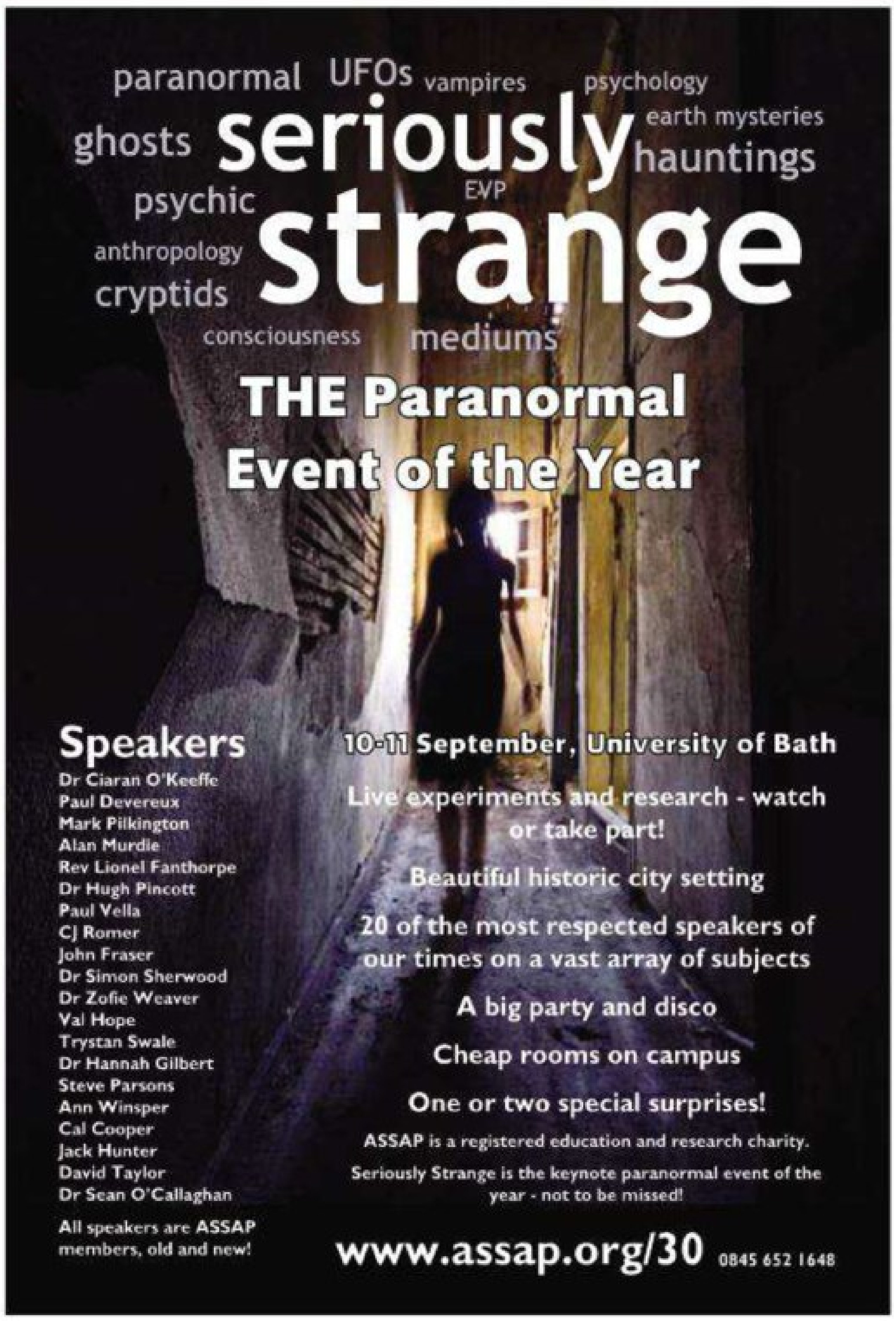
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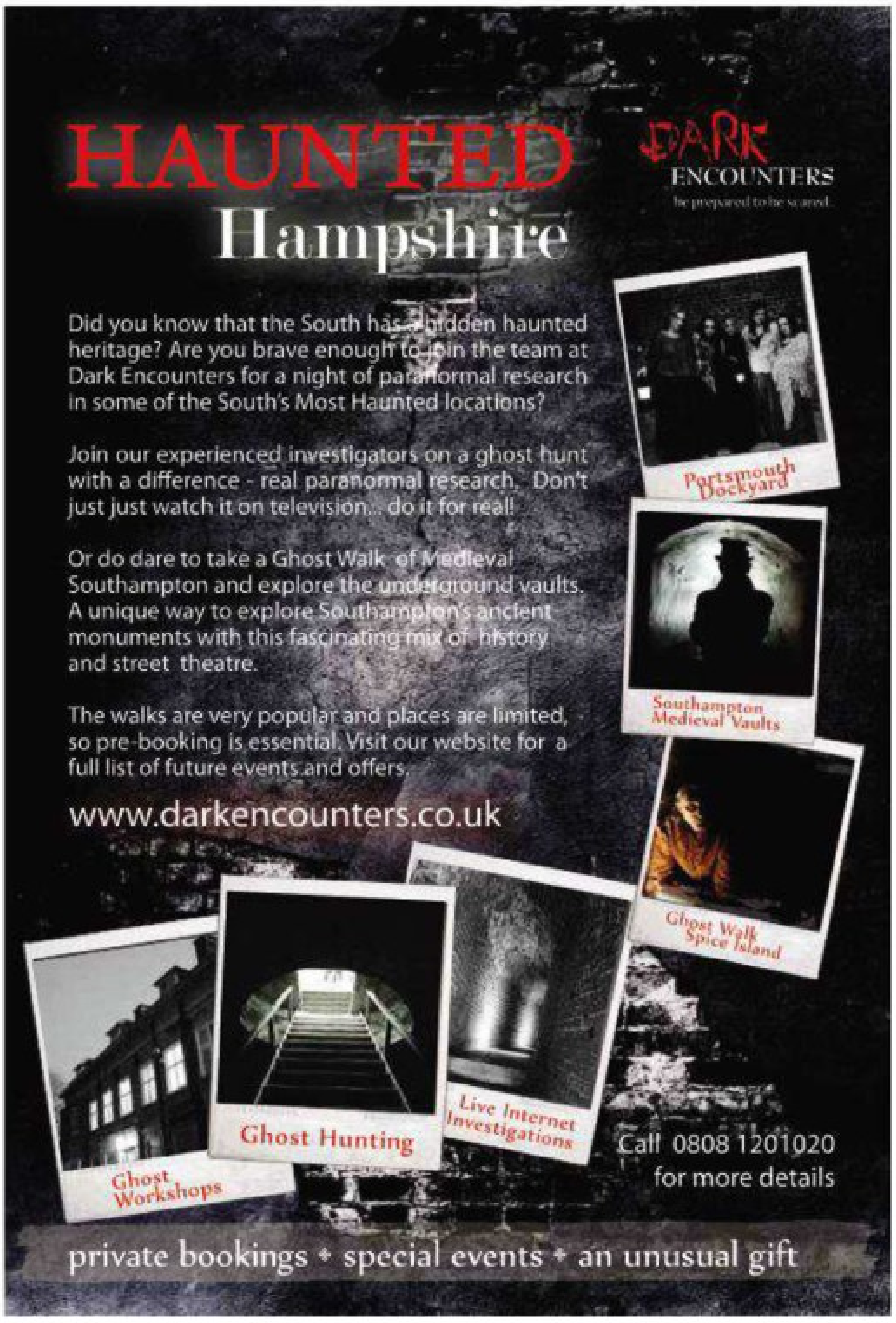
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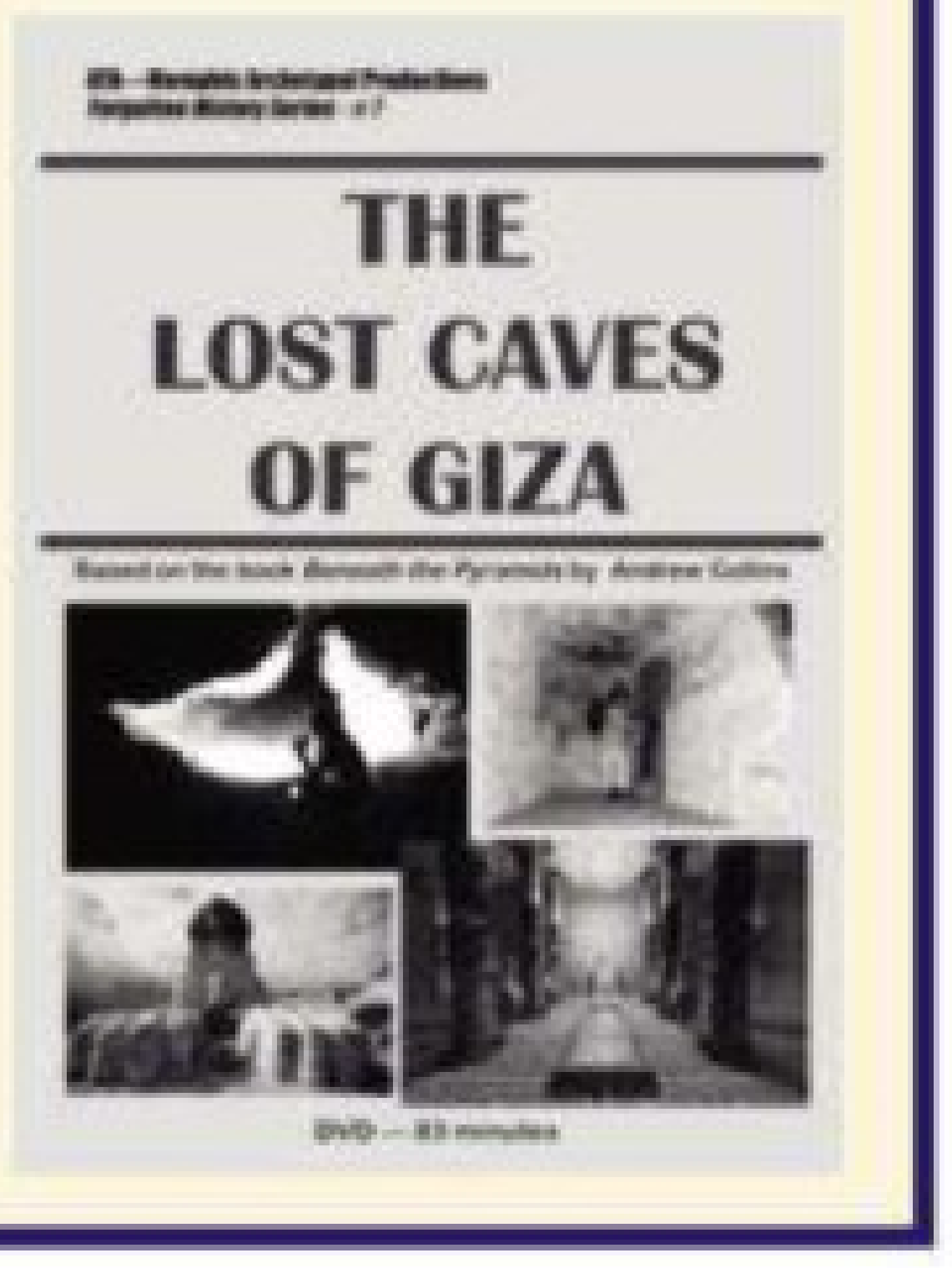
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letters

Phantom time

I enjoyed Jerry Glover's piece on the Phantom Time Hypothesis of Heribert Illig and his German associates [**FT276:58–59**], though I'm rather baffled by the apparently narrow eurocentrism of the proposal. European history hardly stands alone, and reference to other chronologies would swiftly dispose of the idea. For example, Chinese historical records are complete, and the chronology well established, for the entire Christian era and some centuries before, and there are occasions where they intersect with European history.

To take a single instance, as long ago as 1885 Friedrich Hirth[1] quoted the official *History of the Later Han Dynasty* as mentioning an embassy from the Roman emperor 'An-Tun' arriving in China in AD 166. This is usually thought to be Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161–180); in any case it would appear to refer to an emperor of the Antonine dynasty (138–192). If three centuries had been deleted from European history, the Antonines would have reigned from 438–492, making it rather difficult for them to send an embassy in 166. And three centuries before the Antonines, of course, there wouldn't have been any Roman Emperors at all. Examples could be multiplied. Perhaps more baffling still, Friedrich Hirth was a German scholar…

Steve Moore
London

NOTE

[1] F Hirth: *China and the Roman Orient*, 1885, repr. Ares Publishers Inc, Chicago, 1975, p42.

Leaded fuel

Regarding that yarn about slipping back in time and filling up at a gasoline station from the past [**FT274:46**]. What Mark and Julia failed to take into account is that leaded gas was outlawed in the US on 1 January 1996, long before this incident from 2004. Gasoline pumped in the 1940s would have been leaded and Mark's F150 would not have run well on it, if at all. Further, to prevent accidentally dispensing leaded gas into a vehicle that is designed for unleaded, the automobile manufacturers introduced a smaller diameter filler hole that prohibits the original larger nozzle from fitting. It's physically impossible to put leaded gas into a vehicle that's made for unleaded. It's a pity that Mark and Julia didn't buy a vintage Coke and a Hershey bar to bring back with them as evidence that they had travelled into the past. But it would have been easy to test the fuel in their tank to see if it was leaded or unleaded. I'm sure they have filled up since then, however.

David Burd
By email

Biblical errors

In the latest issue, both Merrily and Patrick Harpur mention Daniel passing through the fiery furnace [**FT276:41+43**]. However, although Daniel is involved in the story, and indeed it is in his eponymous book of the Old Testament, it is his followers – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pass unharmed through the fiery furnace into which Nebuchadnezzar has thrown them. In the same issue, the Hierophant's Apprentice shifts the site of the water/wine miracle from Cana to Canaan [**FT276:53**]. It's a pity that such minor errors mar two otherwise fascinating features.

Graham Mogford
Tettenhall, West Midlands

Cheese bombardment

Regarding the tale of the *USS Arakine/Arakwe* [**FT271:48, 274:73**], I believe the facts of two stories may have been combined to become an even better one. I think the vessel in question is the *USS Wateree*, whose story can be found here: http://1.usa.gov/h5fey6 (history.navy.mil).

As to the cheese cannon balls, the show *Mythbusters* stated that during an 1840 naval battle between Uruguay and Brazil it is said that the Uruguayan captain ran out of cannon balls mid-battle and had the bright idea of using as a cannon ball replacement the Dutch Edam cheese he was carrying, so he ordered his sailors to load the cheese into the cannons. Allegedly the cheese cannon balls shredded his opponent's sails and the Uruguayans won the day. There is a *Mythbuster* video on YouTube showing the set-up.

Mark Lape
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Ocular migraine

Even before I finished reading the first column of "Stop Making Sense" [**FT276:6–7**] I was thinking the cause of these incidents – US television presenters talking gibberish – was probably something like an ocular migraine. I think this is the same thing as the "migraine auras" mentioned in footnote #2. I experience occasional ocular migraines and they *do* result in stroke-like effects without the physical symptoms of slurred speech or facial drooping. It's as if there is a temporary disconnect between brain and mouth, or eyes and brain. You *know* you aren't saying what you want to be saying. You hear it coming out wrong and you have to concentrate very hard to make the words come out that you intend to say. If you are reading, you *know* the words in your brain are *not* the words in front of you. You get sparkly visual effects in your eyes. The first time it happened was very creepy and scary. On a couple of occasions, I've had to leave work and go home because I couldn't function. Now that I know what my triggers are, I can stave off serious symptoms and "fake it till I make it". If you are in front of a TV camera, that won't work.

For me, the trigger is glare. Bright sunlight reflecting through the windshield or peeping through a crack in a Venetian blind and LEDs have all triggered the effect in me. Now, as soon as I notice the sparkly visual effects in my eyes (like sparkly 'floaters') I put on sunglasses and cut glare and I can sometimes ward off a full-blown episode. Maybe bright camera lights are triggering ocular migraines in these TV presenters. Why this would suddenly affect so many people in a short time I can't explain, and Jan Brewer's hysterical laughter might be something else, unless she just freaked out because of the other symptoms. Based on my personal experiences, I have to disagree with Angela Kennedy that a TIA (transient ischæmic attack, or mini-stroke) is the "most plausible explanation". I vote for the ocular migraine.

Tracey Serle
Alexandria, Virginia

Conspiracy or cock-up?

In this month's editorial [**FT276:4**] you mention a research project that suggests some people are inherently more likely than others to believe in conspiracy theories. In cases where there is a choice between conspiracy and cock-up (as there often is), I suspect the opposite is also true: some people are naturally predisposed to believe in a cock-up. Having witnessed countless back-room cock-ups during the 10 years I worked as a civil servant, this is certainly true in my case!

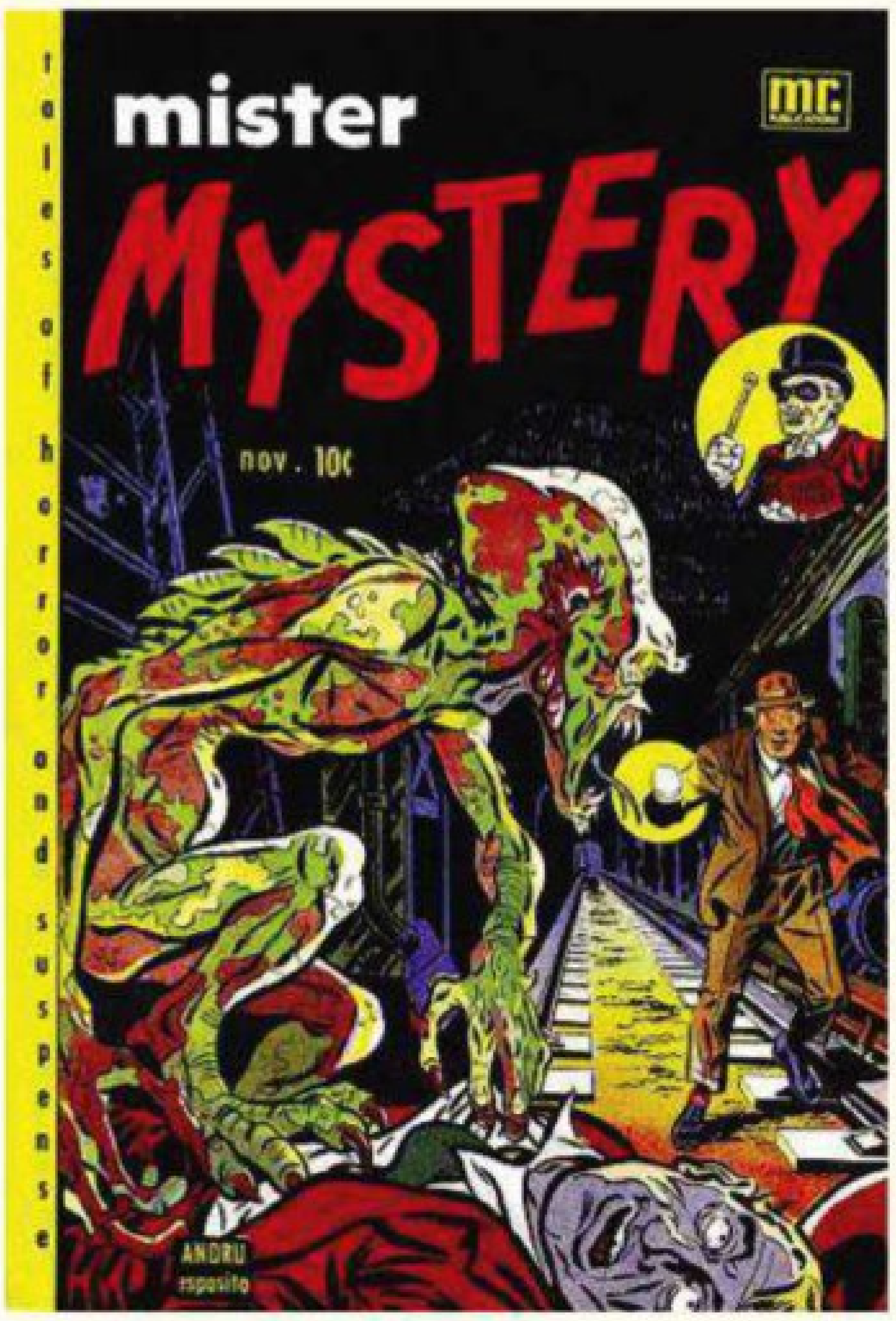
Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset

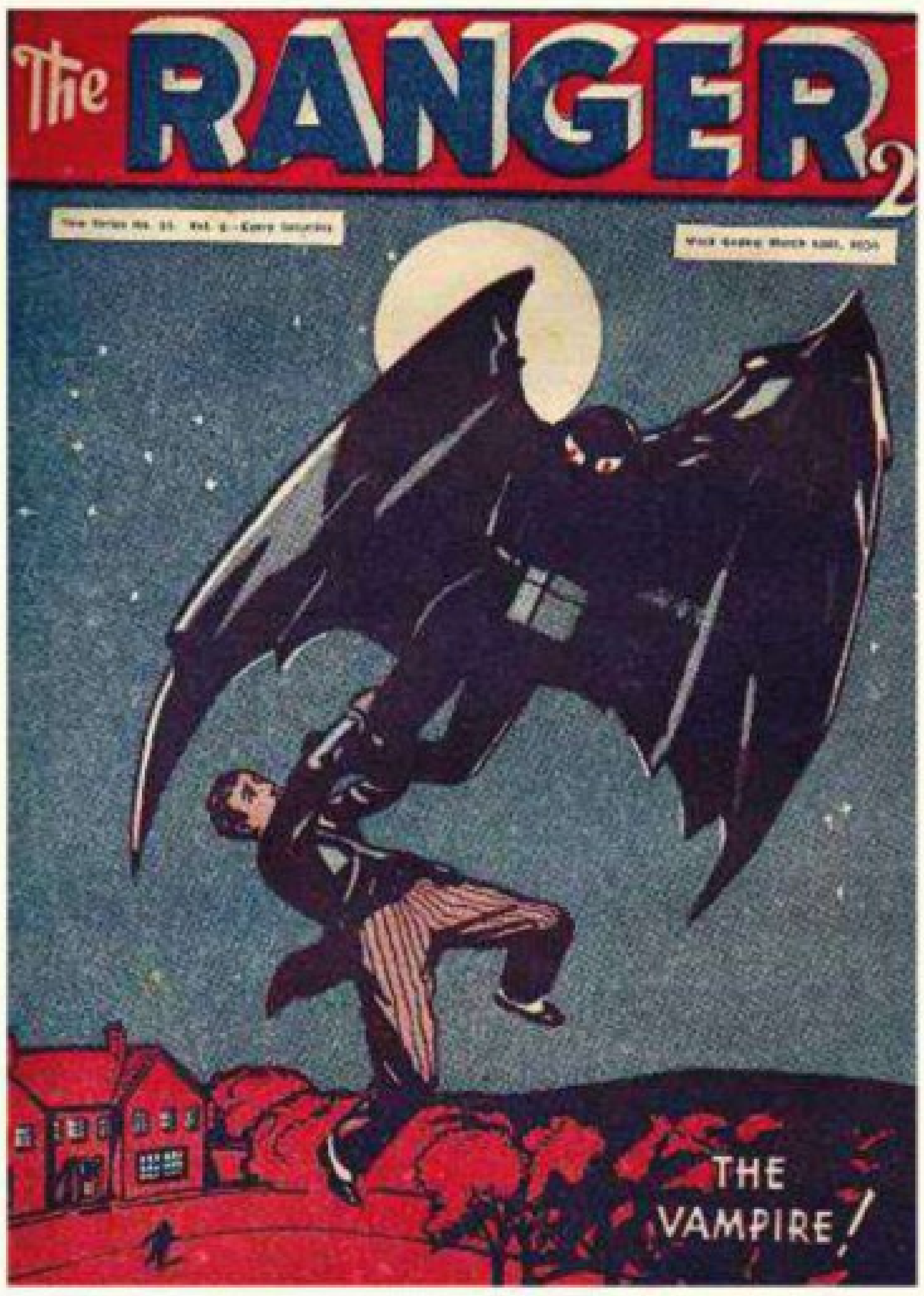
A fan writes

I love *Fortean Times*, and wait all month long for it to come. It's the most entertaining and downright funny magazine I have ever subscribed to. Each time I get a new issue, I spend the night in a comfy chair in front of the fire with a glass of Dubonnet and my lazy tabby cat. American TV is boring and useless, so keep on printing all that crazy stuff.

Rose Titus
Andover, Massachusetts

letters





Picturing chupacabra

Regarding the convincing links between Gieger's Sil and the Chupacabra(s) [**FT271:30–35**]: I've found something else that could be thought of as an "inspiration" for the goat-sucker, on the cover of an American horror comic published in November 1951, illustrated by Mike Esposito (here under the pseudonym of Andru Esposito). It seems to be an increasingly familiar character-type.

Ryan Davies
Waterloo, Merseyside

Ranger's Owlman

I thought I would share this scan of the front cover of the *Ranger* boy's story paper dated 10 March 1934. The depiction of a man-sized 'vampire bat' is strikingly similar to both Loren Coleman's depiction of the Point Pleasant Mothman [**FT156:26–53**] and the Cornish Owlman (or 'Bird-Man') sightings of the 1970s [**FT16:19**, **17:17–19**, etc].

In the years preceding the launch of Bob Kane's well-known *Batman* comic-book character in 1939, British story paper covers often featured 'winged humans'; among them the 'Human Bat' (*Jacks Paper*, Nov 1922), the 'Flying Boy' (*The Modern Boy*, Oct 1932) and the 'Bird Man' (*The Modern Boy*, June 1936). However, this example is striking in that it bears glowing red eyes, a feature reported in many of the original Mothman accounts.

In the story itself, however, the 'vampire bat' turns out to be an ageing scientist who utilises an anti-gravity machine in conjunction with a bat suit and a blowpipe with which he shoots poison at his victims. Obvious, really!

Alistair Moffatt
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Ash trick

No history of Sathya Sai Baba [**FT276:28**] is complete without mention of his chief opponent, the late Basava Premanand (1930–2009), "scourge of the godmen". At Conway Hall, London, in 1995, Premanand walked among the audience, sprinkling "divine ash" from his fingertips into the outstretched palms of about 300 people, then mounted the stage and produced a considerable pile of divine ash, by rubbing his hands together for three or four minutes.

He then explained that the divine ash consisted of burned camel dung. The dung of no other animal, he said, would produce ash in the same way. There had been a slight problem bringing it through customs at Heathrow Airport. "What is this stuff?" "Burned camel dung." "So why are you importing it?"

Another trick he did (and explained) was to turn water into wine: "If Jesus had turned water into wine by putting his hand in a stream or a horse trough, I would have had to say it was a miracle: but in a bottle, it's quite easy".

Donald Rooum
London

The Boy Jones

I enjoyed "Queen Victoria's Stalker" [**FT274:32–37**], but would dispute Jan Bondeson's assessment of Edward Jones's mental state. Schizoid Personality Disorder (SPD) is not normally diagnosed until adulthood and Jones was displaying odd behaviour by his early teens. I wonder if a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) might be a more likely explanation? Conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Asperger's Syndrome fall under this category and they typically present from early childhood.

Repetitive behaviour, narrow interests (often meaningless to others, but bordering on the obsessive) and difficulties interacting appropriately with others are typical of such PDDs. Well before adulthood, Jones had trespassed repeatedly, seemingly motivated to do so by a keen interest in Queen Victoria. He is even supposed to have observed her with her husband. A voyeuristic interest in other people is not normally a characteristic of SPD, but, in my experience, can be in Asperger's Syndrome. Indeed, people with SPD tend to have few, if any, specific interests.

Jones also occupied himself by building houses out of cardboard, reading scrap paper and scribbling copious notes that he would then throw on the fire. He was described as 'odd' and 'a loner', had no friends and showed little interest in his own family. While this presentation could be seen as schizoid, I think it's more likely to have been ASD or Asperger's, given the early onset. In addition, people with SPD tend to be unfocused and vague, while Jones demonstrated intense focus in his activities. Interestingly, a specific PDD diagnosis in childhood pre-empts a diagnosis of SPD in adulthood. It is acknowledged that the two are very similar.

ASD or Asperger's Syndrome? Jones showed a degree of inhibition, evidenced by 'hiding' and 'lurking' in the Queen's chambers. People with Asperger's are more likely than those with ASD to develop some awareness of social mores and the expectations of others. Also, they tend to show more of an interest in other people, albeit inappropriately at times, but still lack nonverbal communication skills to develop close friendships. Furthermore, Jones seems to have shown some intelligence and problem-solving abilities. He wasn't described as 'feeble-minded' and was judged as able to stand trial, which fits more with the Asperger's profile. ASD is more often associated with learning disabilities.

(I've used the *WHO International Classification of Diseases*, 10th edition (2007) and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) IV as references. I'm aware that DSM V will be published this year.)

Phil McNally RN(LD), RN(MH)
Bolton, Greater Manchester

Pancake theory?

I was rather disturbed by Simon Watts's dismissal of Robin Ramsay's discussion on some of the mysterious questions concerning 9/11 [**FT275:69**]. The events of that day are the most fortean perhaps of our generation. Here we have three buildings that seemingly defy physics and collapse in on themselves through the path of most resistance. Perhaps Mr Watts would like to explain how that is possible. Pancake theory? Really? NIST's own experiments did not support that theory and Building 7 (to which pancake theory does not apply) has not been explained. Surely anyone with a questioning mind would extract at the very least some entertainment from some of the mysterious coincidences that surround the events of that day. We even have the BBC predicting the future (announcing the spontaneous collapse of WTC 7 a while before it happened).

Nine/eleven is a very emotional topic and the implications of it being an 'inside job' are perhaps too horrendous to consider, and that is why people tend to take one side or the other instantly, which makes 9/11 an even more fortean subject; I'm surprised there is not more coverage of it in *Fortean Times*. I urge anyone who hasn't yet done so to research the events of that day for themselves. It is possible to find fully sourced information and timelines and go from there – whichever direction you take, you will find more questions and more strange occurrences – some crazy theories and some perhaps more 'plausible' theories – but at the very least it should keep the fortean in you very happy.

In the meantime, until someone can explain how it is physically possible for the top of a building to pile drive through its own central core consisting of 47 steel columns at the core, 59 steel tube supports per side and concrete floors etc. in a little under free fall speed *twice* (not to mention WTC 7), I will remain very sceptical about the official explanation. The 'implausibility' of government complicity is somehow more plausible than the suspension of the laws of physics.

Matt Elliott
By email

One big thing

Barry Baldwin [Classical Corner, **FT275:19**] says that Archilochus's proverb "The fox knows many things; the hedgehog knows one big thing" is "still puzzling". This is a well-known traditional story. Fox, a Trickster, wishes to eat Hedgehog, and engages him in conversation to lull suspicion. Fox brags that he knows many tricks. Hedgehog responds "I have only one trick – but it's a very good one!", and curls himself into a ball, frustrating Fox. In Laura Gibbs's translation of Aesop's Fables she gives as Fable 236, 'The Fox and the Cat', a similar tale, though Cat's one trick is to climb a tree to escape the dogs and hunters who catch Fox despite his bag of 17 tricks. In a note, Gibbs invites comparison with the Archilochus proverb.

Ewan McVicar
Linlithgow, Lothian

Barry Baldwin responds: Archilochus's line is quoted by the late paroemiographer Zenobius (5.68). It had obviously mutated into a proverb. Well after Aesop, Erasmus's 'Adagia' (AD 1500) renders it "*multa novit vulpes, verum echinus unum magnum.*" McVicar's interpretation of Archilochus's line as a proverb was anticipated by Maurice Bowra in *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1940). However, this is dismissed as "not likely" by the authoritative modern editor David Campbell (*Greek Lyric Poetry*, 1967, p160) who thinks the poet "simply means" that his iambic verses are his only weapon but a deadly one. Isaiah Berlin used the line as title for his much-reprinted essay on Tolstoy, about which he later said: "I never meant it very seriously. I meant it as a kind of intellectual game, but it was taken seriously." Incidentally, I agree with Christopher Hitchens that Berlin himself was an inflated windbag. Since we have no context for Archilochus's line, interpretation must remain an open question, hence my puzzlement.

Deaf dogs

It's not true that "cats are the only animals besides humans that are born congenitally deaf ("A new way of looking" **FT275:11**); Dalmatian dogs can also be born congenitally deaf.

Neil Woolley
By email

Merlin's sacred springs

I enjoyed Ted Harrison's article on healing waters [**FT275:36–41**], all the more so because of my own encounter with a fascinating mediæval discussion of this very subject. I recently translated Geoffrey of Monmouth's epic poem *Vita Merlini* ("The Life of Merlin") into English. In Geoffrey's poem (written circa 1150), Merlin is driven mad and becomes a "Wild Man of the Woods", but when he and his learned friend Taliesin are told of a new spring gushing forth in the forest they can't restrain their curiosity:

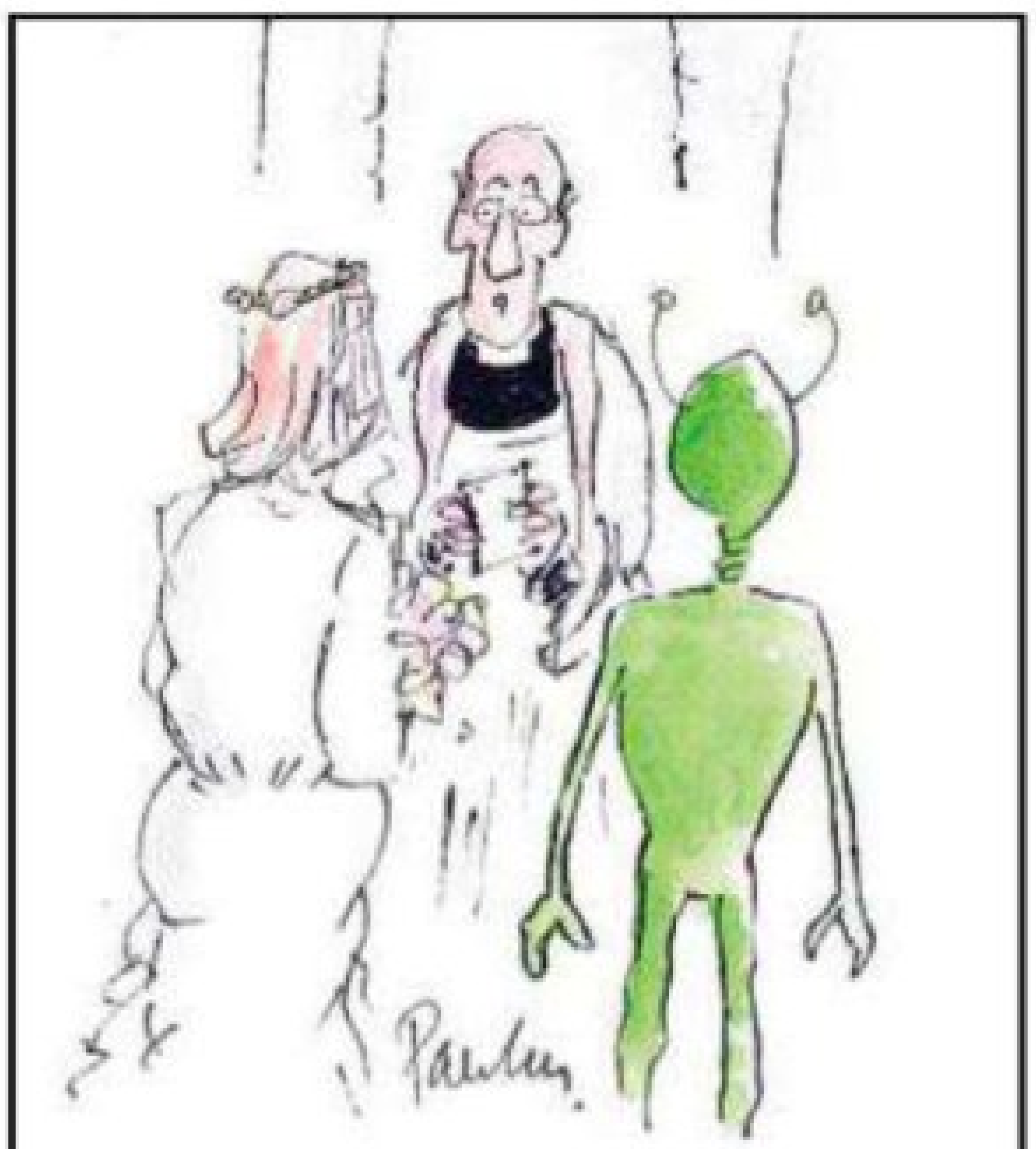
So Taliesin and Merlin arose and then rushed to the site of the fountain; / Merlin there sat on the grass and admired the pellucid outpouring / Waters and wondered just how they could spring from the earth in this manner. / Then he was captured by thirst and so bending he drank from the river, / Washing his brow at the same time: thus as the liquid was coursing / Through all his innards it gave him relief from the heat of his organs, / Calming both body and mind, so he came to his senses and banished / Madness entirely as feeling revived and his former existence, / Healthy and sane, was restored to him then and his reason recaptured.

Sanity restored, Merlin asks Taliesin to discourse on the nature of healing waters and sacred springs, and the Welsh bard happily complies by offering a long list of springs and their healing powers, derived by Geoffrey from the encyclopædic writings of Isidore of Seville (7th century AD). These include Cicero's Spring in Italy that cures blindness, the African Zama which gives one's voice "a melodious sweetness", two in Sicily, one that makes girls barren while the other makes them fertile, and two rivers in Thessaly, one that turns white sheep black and the other black sheep white: if they drink from both rivers their coats become mottled! The only British example Taliesin mentions are the famous hot springs at Bath:

Worthy of note, our salubrious hot springs succour the needy, / Soothing their sickness in pleasantly warming and curative waters; / Bladud established these baths which are named for his consort Alaron: / They are especially useful in curing diseases of women. / Taliesin adduces the reason for their curative properties thus: / Many such springs have a dangerous heat, which is gained as they flow through / Sulphur or alum, whose powers of warming are useful in treatment. / God has enriched all the waters with these and additional virtues, / So that the sick can be cured in a trice, while revealing the goodness / Of the Creator, preeminent in and above all of Nature.

[All quotes from my translation, *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin: A New Verse Translation*, Amberley Publishing, 2011]

Mark Walker
Amersham, Bucks



"...and forsaking all other aliens..."

PAUL TAYLOR

it happened to me...

Have you had strange experiences that you cannot explain?
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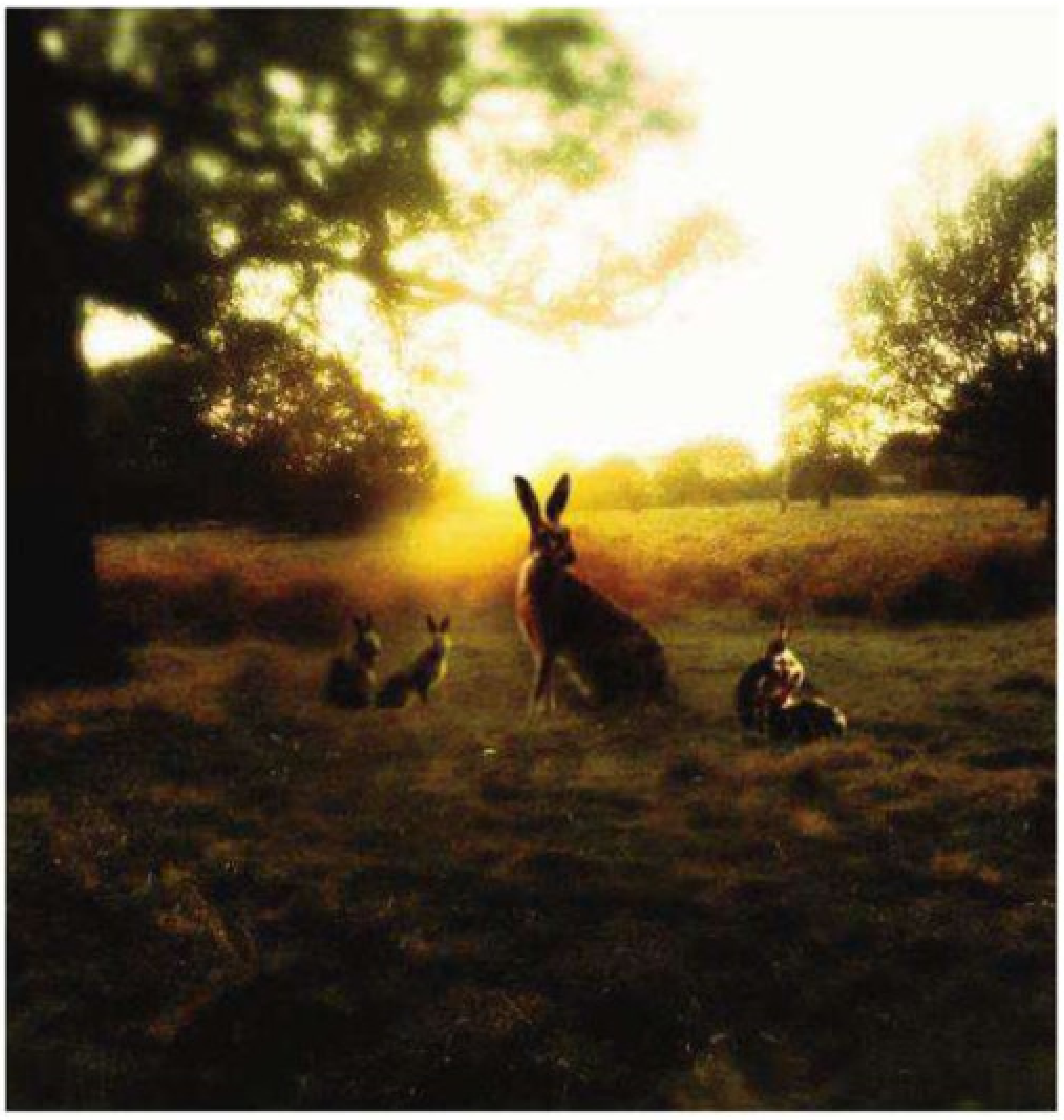
King hare

In the hot summer of 1976, I set off with a pack-pony and greyhound from Stow-in-the-Wold. I was starting a long-distance trek as a sort of pilgrimage and also to explore ancient trackways. The journey took me through the Cotswolds, the Wiltshire Downs, west Dorset coastal areas and then ended in Butleigh, near Glastonbury. It took me a couple of months.

During early September, I was travelling through the hamlet of Uploders, near Bridport in Dorset. I had permission to put my pony in an orchard there and after erecting my tent, I decided to head off up into the neighbouring hills to see if my dog could catch a rabbit or hare for the pot. On a lonely track, I met up with two gypsy men and their lurchers and we decided to combine forces. We walked in the evening sun, enjoying the views, and came to a valley. There we saw a group of around 10 hares, an unusual sight for the time of year, as they are solitary animals, only congregating in early spring. With them seemed to be a roe deer, until we looked a little harder and saw that it was an enormous hare. We stood and watched, absolutely dumbfounded. We obviously didn't loose the dogs and after a while we walked quietly away.

Louise Hodgson
By email

Editor's note: For anomalously large *rabbits*, see **FT220:77**, **233:75**, **276:19**.



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

We looked a little harder and the 'roe deer' turned out to be an enormous hare

Owl & Snoopy's trip

One late-summer night when I was 13, during the hour before dawn, my family was awakened by a very loud breathing sound coming from the roof of our house. It was so loud it sounded like someone noisily exhaling into a microphone. My father claimed it was just an owl – owls do make breathing and hissing sounds – but this would have had to have been a monstrously large owl to reach such a volume. My research over the years has led to no definitive conclusions about what was perching on my parents' roof that night… until I read about the 'booger owl' of Pennsylvania in Alien Zoo [**FT274:21**]. If anyone else has had a similar auditory experience, please write in.

- Over the years, I've read many stories about dogs travelling hundreds of miles returning home to their owners. I was six years old when I got a border collie puppy whom I named Snoopy. He and I grew up together and I hated leaving him behind when I turned 20 and moved 300 miles (480km) away, from Pennsylvania to Virginia. The day after I moved, my mother called me with bad news: Snoopy had run away. Nearly a week later she called with a surprising update: Snoopy had been found, alive and well, by a motorist along the side of I-95 near Spotsylvania, Virginia. Apparently, he had been following my trail, travelling 190 miles (300km) from home, in an attempt to track me down. He was 14 years old with severe cataracts, but the only ill effects he suffered from his voyage were bloody paws from walking so far.

Tamy Kay Thompson
Newport News, Virginia

Zombie wasp

Last summer, while working in my home office, I had a rather bizarre experience with a wasp that had invaded my workspace. Because I needed to get on and because it wouldn't stand still and let me thwack it, I resorted to pesticide, giving it a good few direct blasts from a can of Raid. Within a few seconds, it was thrashing about in its death throes, and to avoid it expiring somewhere I might later put a tender part of my anatomy, I trapped it in a clear plastic container and got on with my work. Within a couple of minutes, as expected, the wasp was flat on its back, legs in the air – dead. Or so I thought.

Several hours later, long after I had forgotten about the wasp, I heard a faint sound coming from the container. To my amazement, it was moving again, and trying (and failing) to climb up the side of its plastic prison. But this was not simply a last gasp. Over the next few minutes it gradually regained more and more strength, until finally it seemed to have entirely recovered from its ordeal. Somewhat horrified (I'm not a big fan of wasps), I'm afraid I then resorted to more direct and definite means of dispatch.

Immediately, I felt this could have been a terrible mistake. Could this pesticide-resistant superwasp have had some scientific value and should I have kept it alive? Worse, would the battered creature rise yet again – mutated into a horrific monster by the foolish application of household chemicals – and exact some awful 1950s-creature-feature-style revenge? Or was the can of Raid just set to 'stun'?

While I await the ominous buzzing at the window, I would love to know if anyone can explain this mysterious insect resurrection, or if they have experienced similar miraculous recoveries from seemingly fatal situations.

Toby Venables
By email

Big cat near Reading

On 19 March 2011, I was at work as a motorcycle instructor south of Arborfield near Reading, between the village and the barracks. At about 10am, my student and I watched a black cat about 7ft (2.1m) long – 5ft (1.5m) body and 2ft (60cm) tail – and about 2ft 6in (76cm) tall walking along next to a fence about 100 yards away, in the field next to our site. It appeared to be stalking some crows; when they flew off, it walked back into the hedgerow. The cat was visible for about one and a half minutes. The fence posts were about 6–7ft (1.8–2.1m) apart and the body of the cat (without tail) was about three-quarters of that in length as it walked past them. Mobile phone resolution was total rubbish, so it wasn't worth taking a shot. I will now be taking a camera to work just in case.

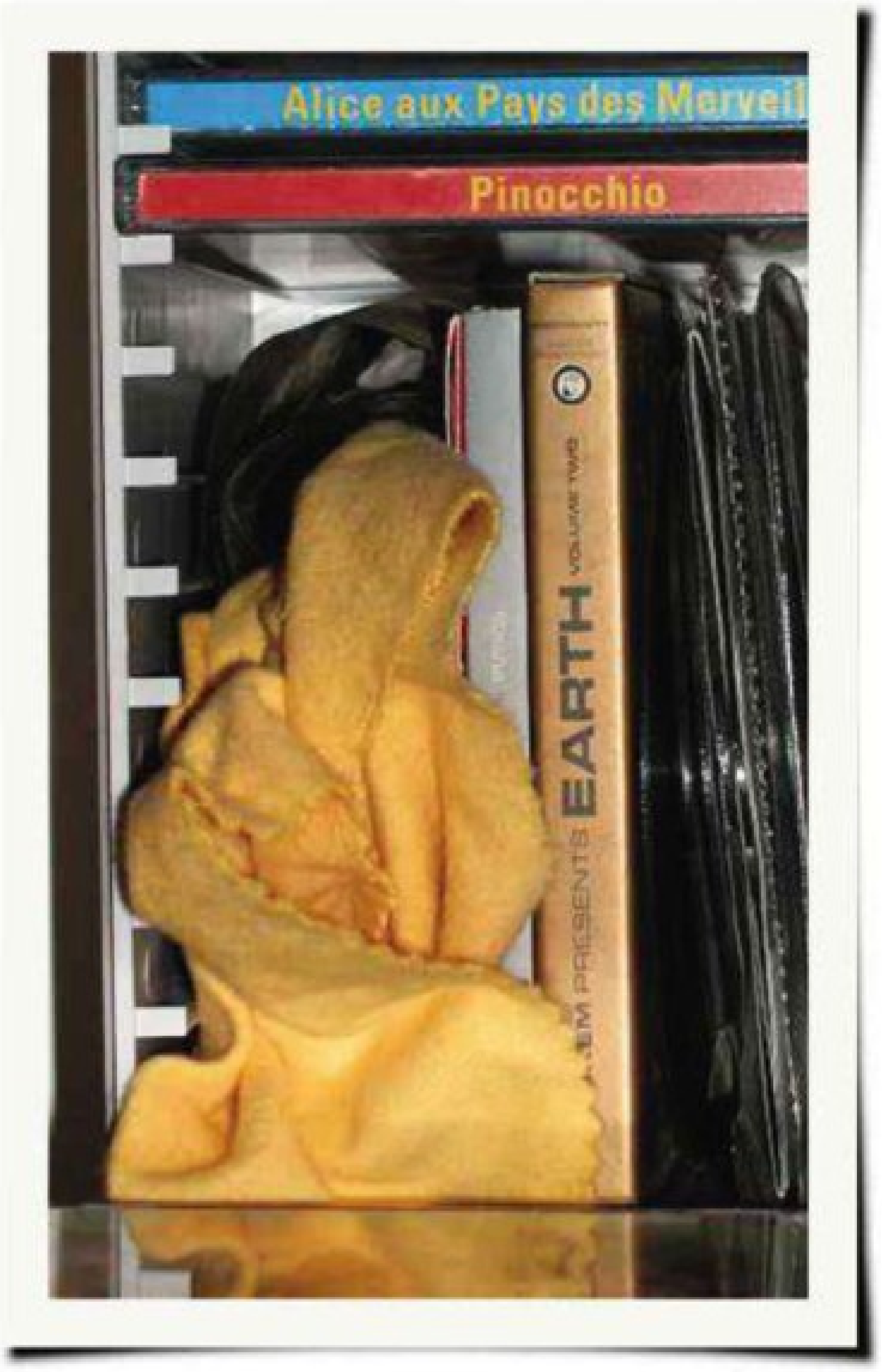
Paul Strudwick
Farnborough, Hampshire

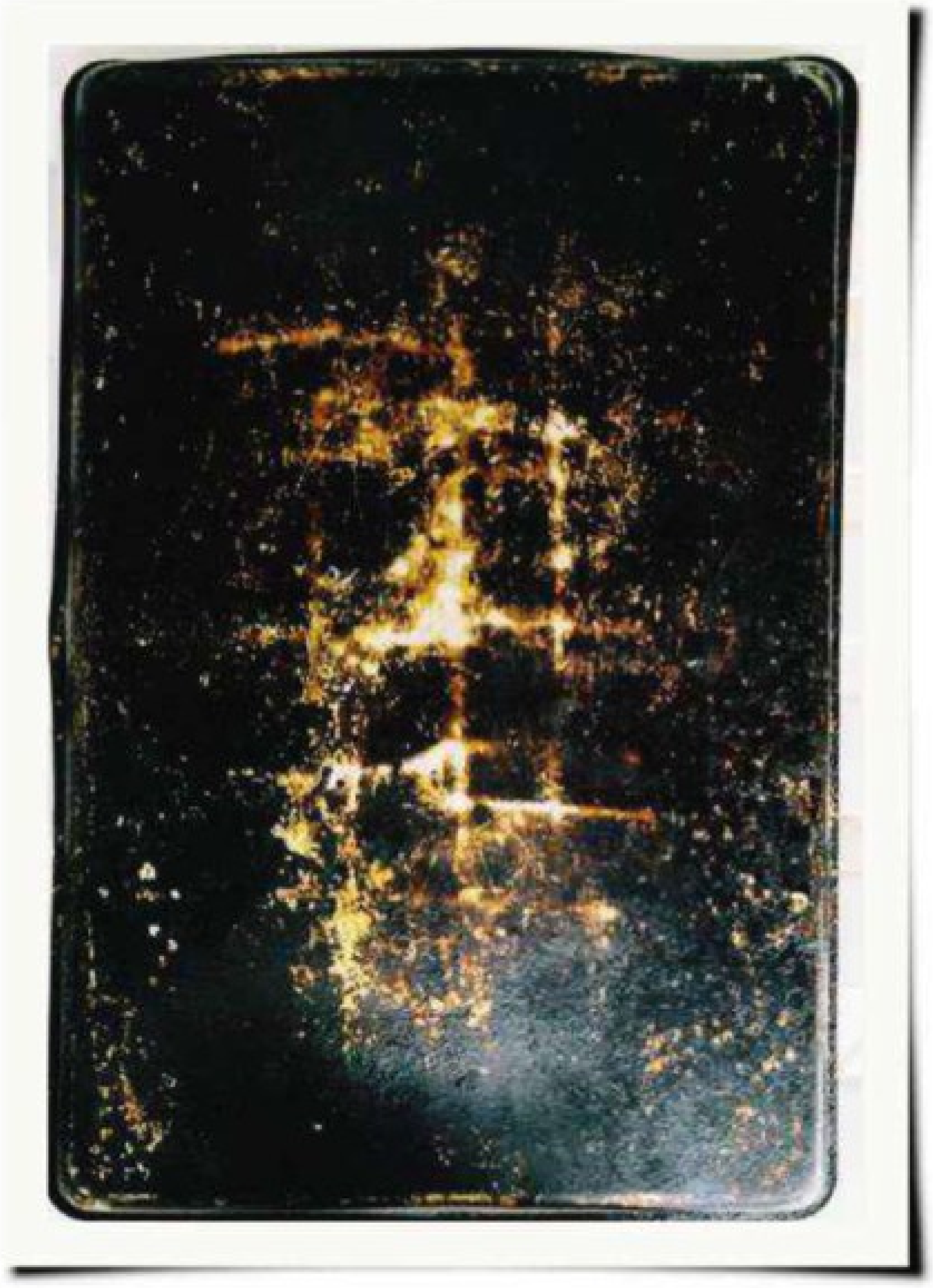
Editor's note: Several hundred local news reports of ABC (alien big cat) sightings in the British countryside are still received at Fortean Towers every year; they are probably the most frequently experienced encounters with the unexplained in the UK.

simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London, NW5 4NP, United Kingdom, or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

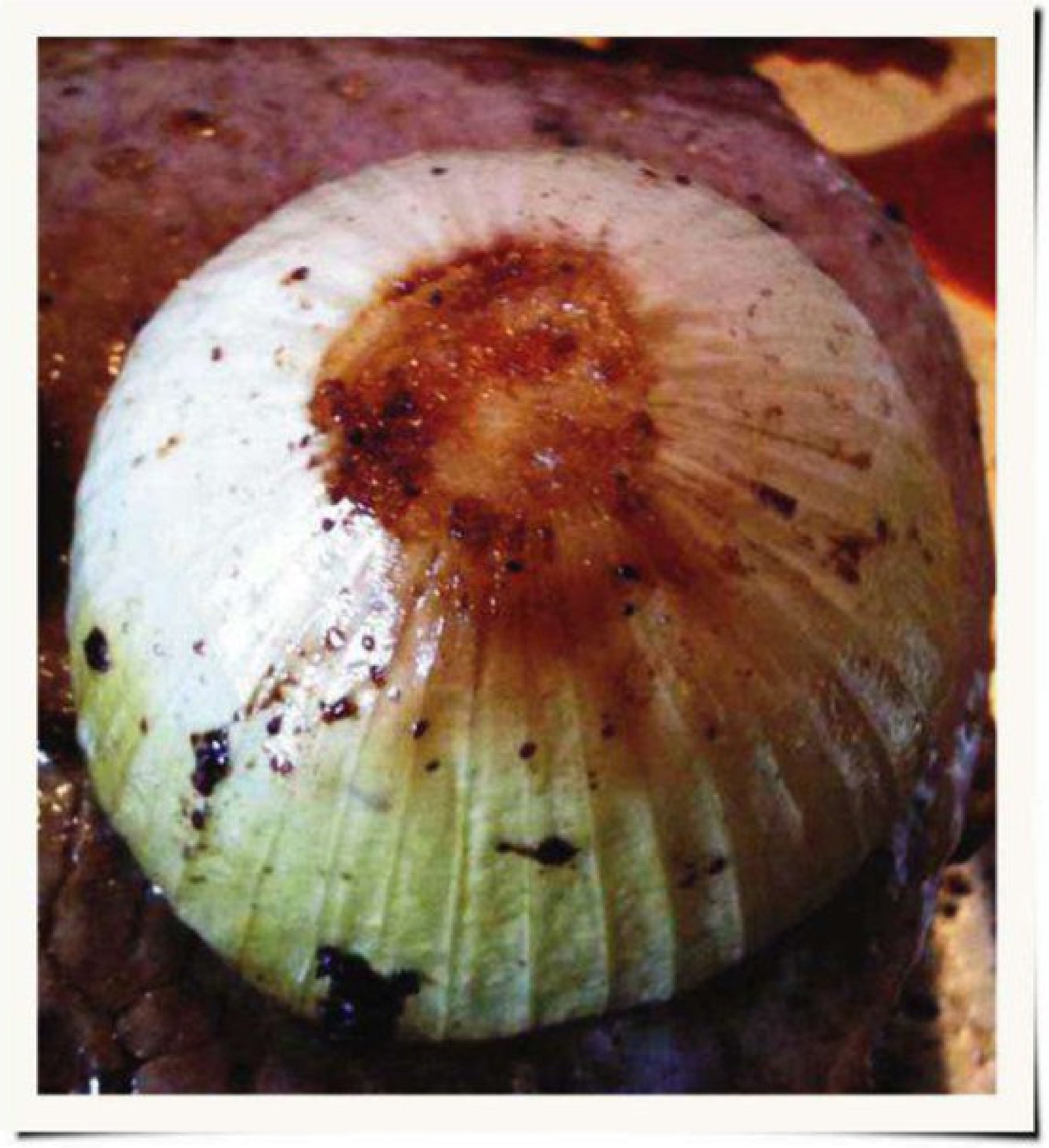
A selection of religious imagery sent in by FT's observant readers.



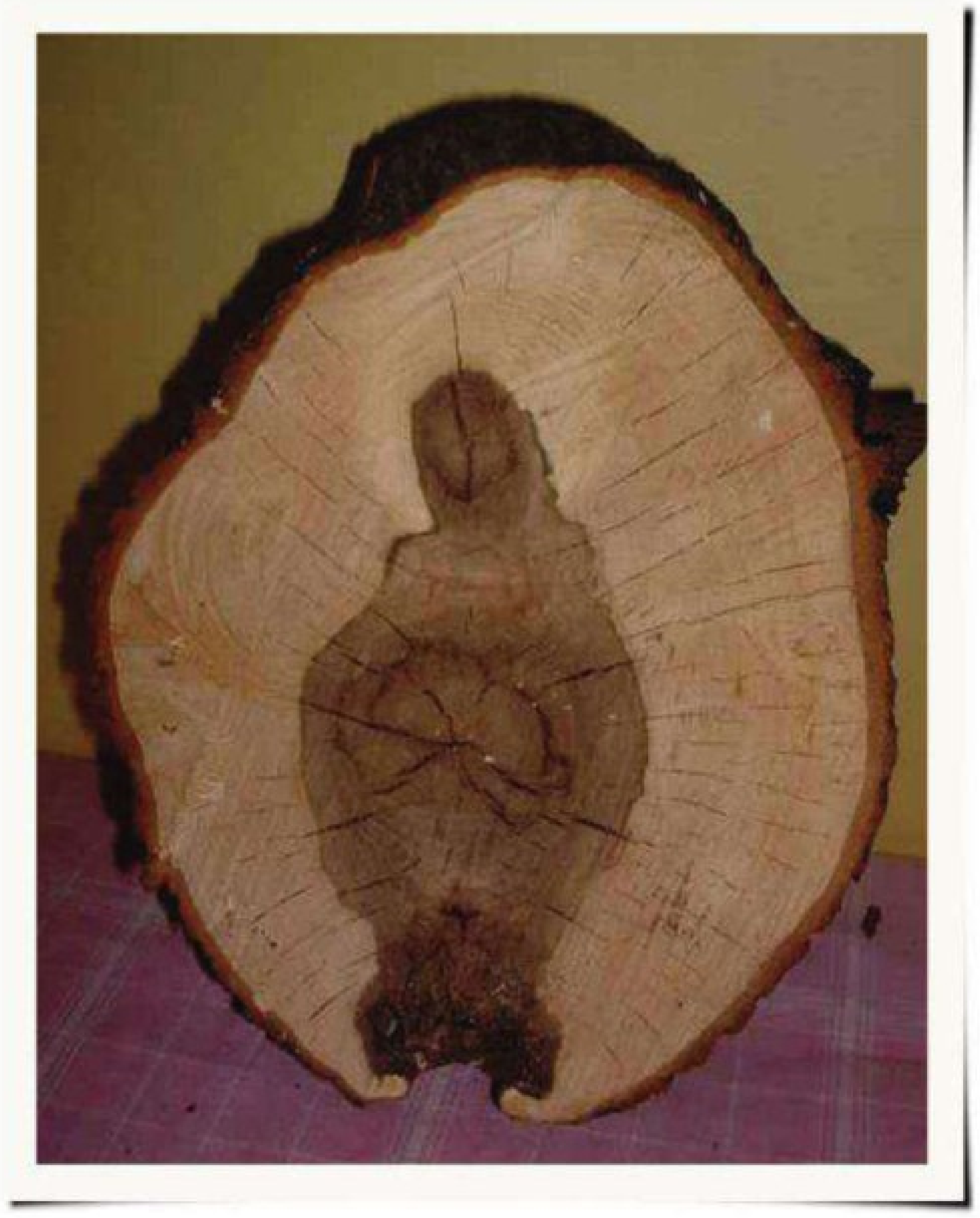


FAR LEFT: Steve Mansfield spotted this Blessed Virgin Mary simulacrum ("Our Lady of the Sacred Record-Cleaning Cloth") in a friend's CD rack, and asked if we could give any advice on setting up a shrine.

LEFT: A baking pan "with a striking image of the face on the Shroud of Turin", sent in by Bill Rae of Bradford, Pennsylvania. "Handed down through the years and blackened from use," he writes, "this pan has multiple scratches and charring on both sides. Then, after using it on Good Friday, I washed it and laid it upside down to dry and saw the image immediately. The photo was shot in natural daylight. There is some sun glare at the bottom right, but there is no digital retouching or other alterations made." The pan measures 9in by 13in (23x33cm).



John S Wilson of Edinburgh noticed this image of a head on an onion he was cooking. Could it be Jesus?



This photo of a Blessed Virgin Mary simulacrum in the cross-section of a felled tree arrived at Fortean Towers in 2006. Unfortunately, the details of who sent it have been mislaid. If it was you, please get in touch.

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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 July 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX Great Occultists Benvenuto Cellini Part 2

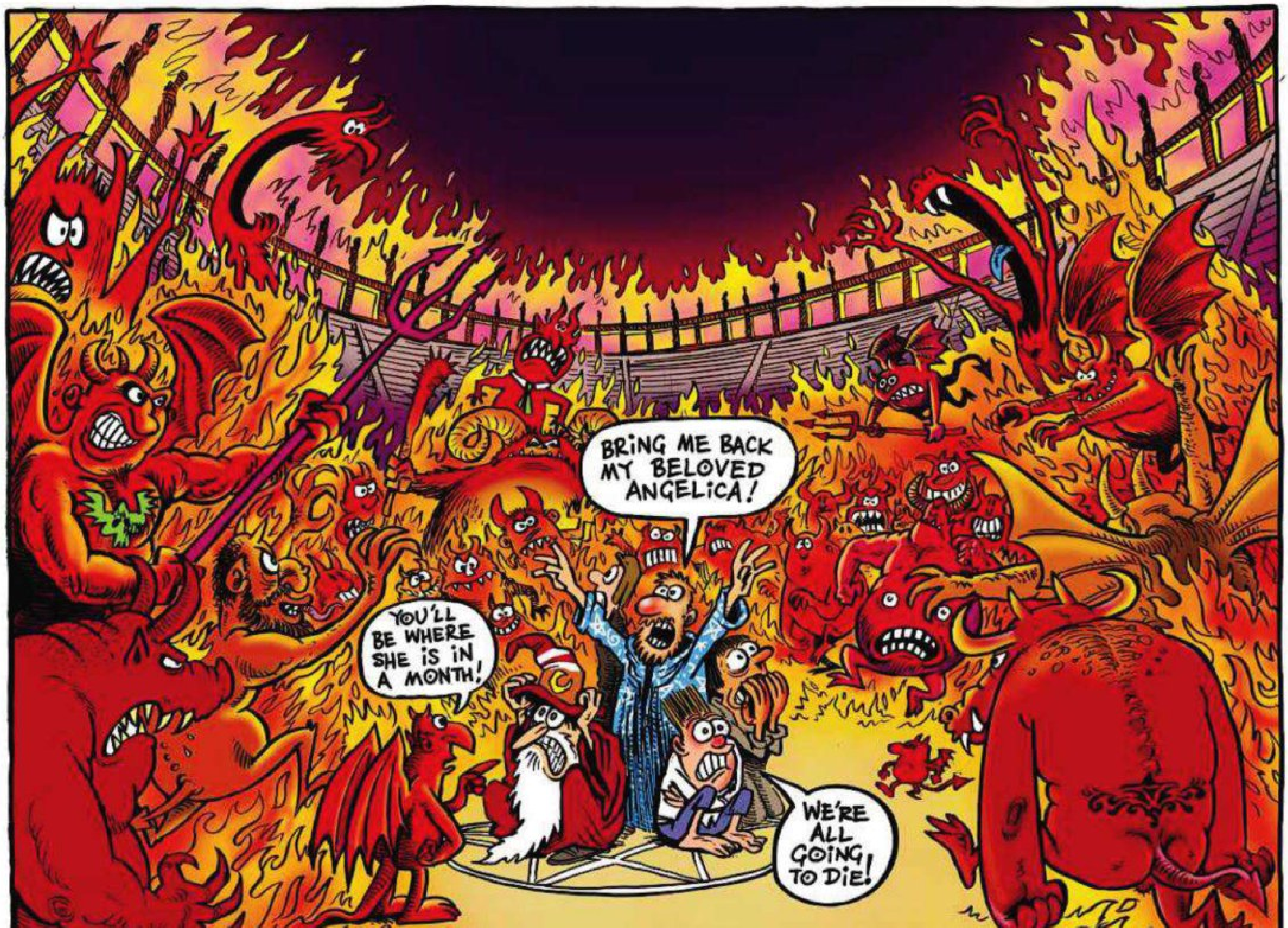
HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

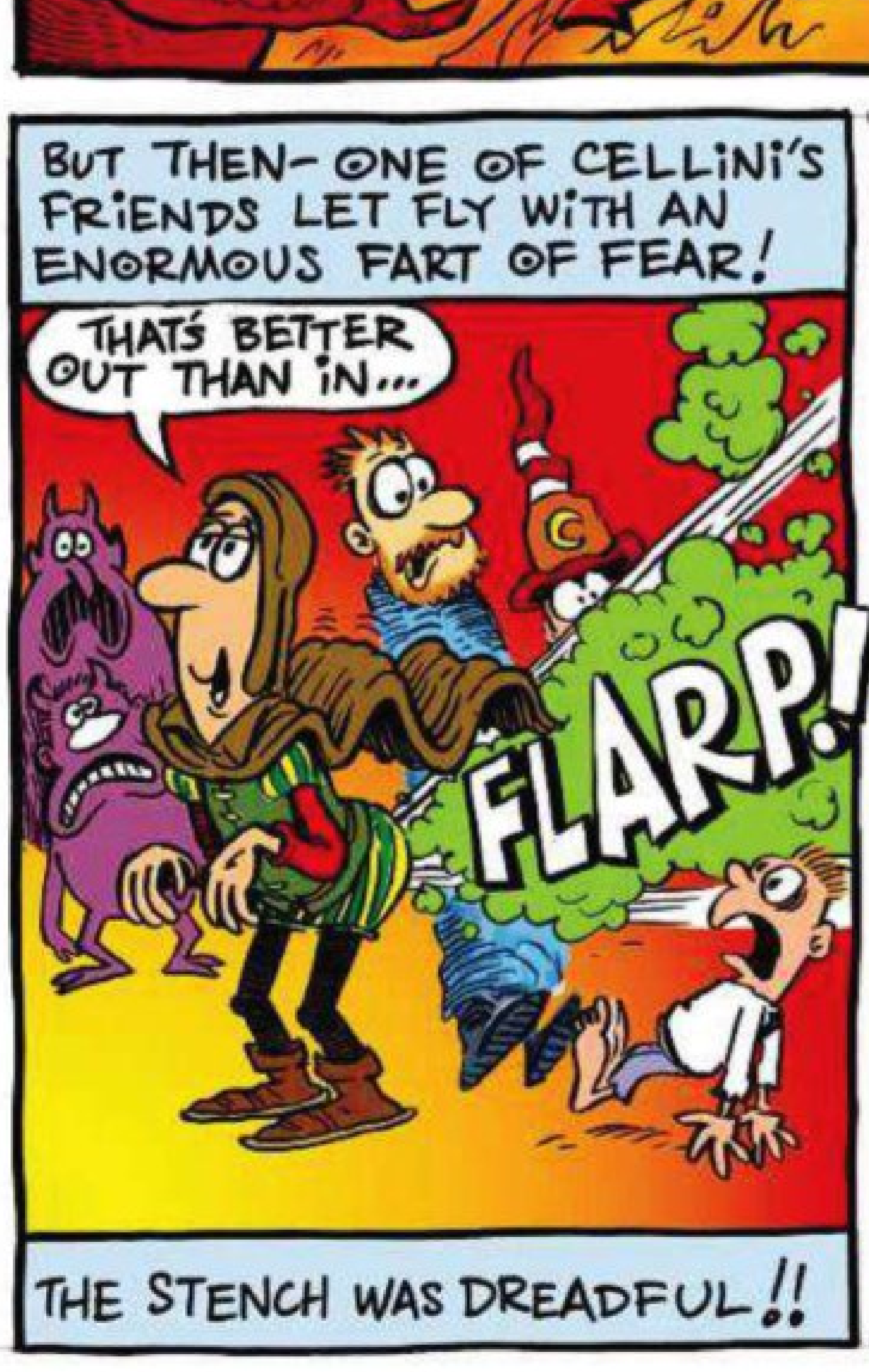
PRELUDE: HUNT EMERSON ADMITS SHAME. Last month i gave Cellini's birthdate as 1550. This was wrong - he was born in 1500. i'm SO sorry!

THE STORY SO FAR:

Benvenuto Cellini, goldsmith and occultist, is trying to get his girlfriend, Angelica, back, using Magic. His first attempt, raising demons in the Colosseum in Rome, is a failure.

The Necromancer who is his guide recommends a repeat performance, at an enhanced fee, and this time involving an innocent young boy. This second attempt is considerably more promising...

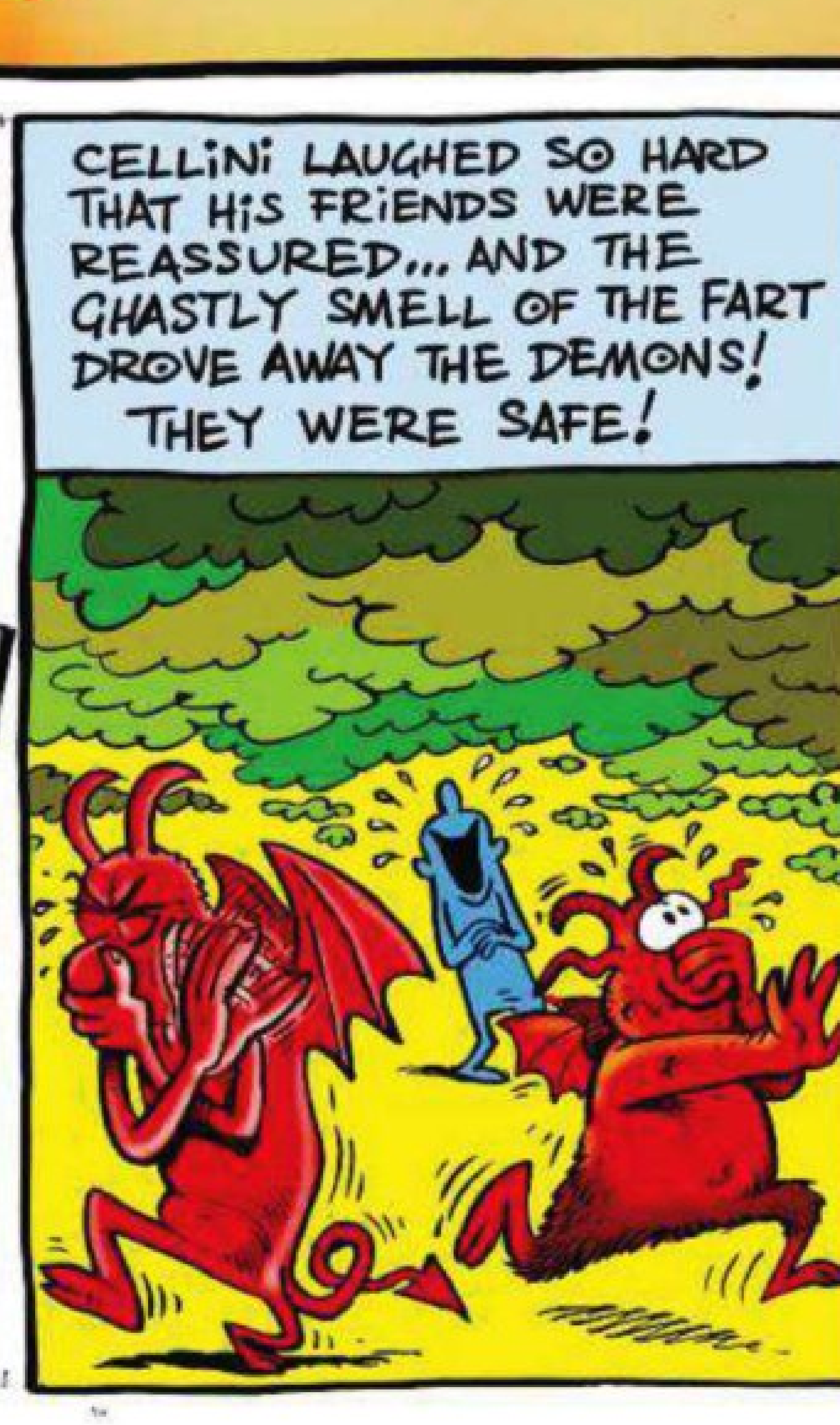

BRING ME BACK MY BELOVED ANGELICA!
YOU'LL BE WHERE SHE IS IN A MONTH!
WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!



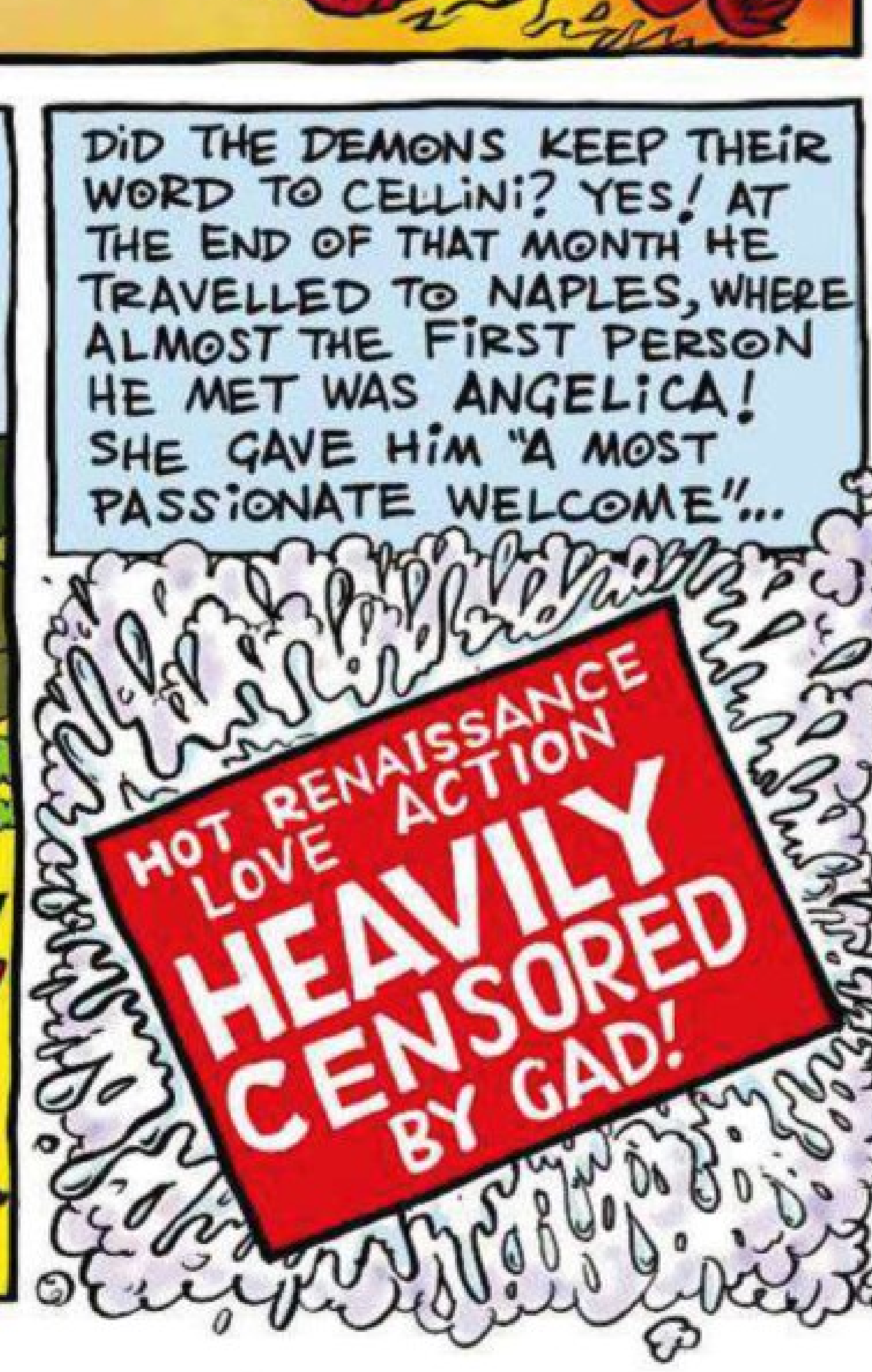
BUT THEN- ONE OF CELLINI'S FRIENDS LET FLY WITH AN ENORMOUS FART OF FEAR!

THAT'S BETTER OUT THAN IN...
FLARP!

THE STENCH WAS DREADFUL!!



CELLINI LAUGHED SO HARD THAT HIS FRIENDS WERE REASSURED... AND THE GHASTLY SMELL OF THE FART DROVE AWAY THE DEMONS! THEY WERE SAFE!



DID THE DEMONS KEEP THEIR WORD TO CELLINI? YES! AT THE END OF THAT MONTH HE TRAVELLED TO NAPLES, WHERE ALMOST THE FIRST PERSON HE MET WAS ANGELICA! SHE GAVE HIM "A MOST PASSIONATE WELCOME"...

HOT RENAISSANCE LOVE ACTION
HEAVILY CENSORED BY GAD!

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FORTEAN TIMES 279

ON SALE 18 AUGUST

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

AUGUST 1981

Perhaps this was DIY month in some celestial calendar – we logged two astonishing tales of self-surgery. A young woman with a newborn baby was found begging on a street in Ithaca, New York, by police patrolmen who noticed her slacks soaked in blood. The woman and her baby were taken to hospital where she confessed to being fed up with her seven-month pregnancy and performing a cæsarean with a penknife. She bit through the umbilical cord and sewed herself up with ordinary cotton thread. Later she was said to be in a "critical" condition; there was no word on the baby's fate. **FT36:26**

A few days later, we learned of a French doctor who calmly castrated himself. Under local anæsthetic, Daniel Kretzschmar removed his left testicle first. After stopping for lunch (steak and veg) and several phone calls he began on the right. It took nearly seven hours, he said. "I just kept cutting… totally absorbed in the technical aspects of the surgery." When done, he "cleaned up the room… put the waste in the trash can and then I saw my patients". **FT36:24–25**

We are so used to reports of the rather formulaic weeping Virgin Mary statues or bleeding icons that the bizarre variation manifesting in the Mahadeva Temple at Chengannur, Kerala, delighted us. It concerned an iron statue of the Hindu goddess Parvati, wife of Shiva, which appeared to menstruate. An old legend claimed that Parvati (aka Durga, Kali, *et al.*) was visiting the area when her monthlies began. She rested upon a stone which, later, was credited with bleeding when damaged. The iron idol was allegedly found during excavations to build the temple on the site. That temple burned down, but a mystical manuscript revealed the location of a buried duplicate of the statue. It now stands in a courtyard opposite the bleeding rock, the latter consecrated according to the Hindu tradition that recognises phallic simulacra as spontaneous images of Shiva's penis. Like the famed blood of St Januarius in Naples, the idol's blood miracle is rare and irregular, only announced when the elder women of the priests' families change the goddess's loincloth during a special festival. This demonstrates how phenomena (genuine or not) and the traditions they engender can be expressions of local beliefs. **FT36:20–21**

AUGUST 1991

On two different occasions, drivers of Weymouth-bound trains from London reported hitting a shadowy figure in Dorset's Bincombe tunnel. Police searches found nothing; this sounds like a classic ghost story, as there are many haunted tunnels in Britain. At about the same time mid-month, an Italian woman on a moped, in Suzzara, Italy, crashed into an oncoming car when a large carp leapt out of the canal alongside the road and slapped her in the face. She had her revenge by taking it home and having it for supper. **FT61:21.**

AUGUST 2001

The mystery of the *Mary Celeste*, a merchant ship found drifting in the Atlantic in December 1872, is a perennial one and the fate of its missing crew much discussed since. The subsequent history of the ship and its cargo has been thoroughly researched; the vessel changed hands many times, falling into an increasingly poor state, reinforcing its reputation as a 'cursed' ship. In 1885, its last owner attempted an insurance fraud by driving it onto a reef off Haiti and setting it on fire. Oddly, the ship (often cited as *Marie Celeste*, an error immortalised in a Conan Doyle story) survived and was left to rot away and be forgotten. Now, on the 9th, the famous adventurer and marine archæologist Clive Cussler announced that his team had found its last resting place south of the Isle de Gonâve, in Haiti's main western bay. **FT151:6–7**

It's been 10 years since Bernard Heuvelmans – frequently referred to as "the father of cryptozoology" – died on the 24th, aged 86. Inspired, as a boy in Belgium, by the adventure fiction of Conan Doyle and Jules Verne, full of new or still-surviving ancient animals in lost lands, he went on to gain a doctorate in zoology and became the premier spokesman for his "new science of undiscovered animals". His key books – *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958) and *In the Wake of the Sea Serpents* (1968) – inspired a new generation of zoologists and forteans to develop the subject further. His valuable personal library, built up over five decades of research, was bequeathed to the Lausanne Museum of Zoology. **FT152:20, 153:24–26**

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"**So far, I have had eighteen novels published!** The Writers Bureau helped make this possible for me. Within six months of enrolling on my course I was having work commissioned by editors and I still work regularly for magazines."
AWARD WINNING WRITER
Christina Jones, Oxfordshire

"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than **150 magazines** around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"
Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent

"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have **eight books already published** and hopefully two more finished."
Michael Foley, Essex

"The amount of hours I have been able to work have been limited but I have earned approx **£3,500** from my writing this year. I now regularly sell articles and am working on a book proposal."
Jane Redfern-Jones.

"I've had **30 pieces** of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago.

"I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time, especially when I consider the severe restrictions on the time I have available for writing. I usually manage about three hours per week, if I'm lucky."
Chris Green, Lincolnshire

"I have earned **£2,500** this past year, mainly from commissioned pieces. I am now regularly being published and am still only half way through the course."
Marie Barbieri.

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